

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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## THE DEAR GIRL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," &c.

### CHAPTER XXIV. A RAY OF COMFORT.

CAPTAIN FILBY had suffered severely during the winter from his habitual pains and aches, and from growing "older every day." His temper, already much inflamed by tropical service, was not improved. He did not own to these acute tortures, having a stoic pride which disdained to let the world know that he was at all inferior to the rest of it in strength or years. But he soothed his sufferings by becoming more ill natured, more malignant, every hour. Even to women, to whom he had hitherto maintained a sort of gruff courtesy, he had grown rude and odious in his remarks. For this sort of old creature, withering out of the world, friendless, cold, dismal, by beating the bars of his old heart while affections and sympathies are glowing ruddily about him, it were better that the Indian fashion obtained, and that he were carried out to the most convenient mountain to die from exposure. At all these settlements we hear now and again of some such old exile shivering out of life, with the greedy fingers of the foreign bireling already on the gold sleeve-links.

It was not yet come to that with Captain Filby; but his cough was very bad, his clearing of his throat a herculean hydraulic labour, most unpleasant to the bystanders, and his limp more and more conspicuous. His oaths—pointed with a spasm—were even more alarming. His stories and scandals were more malicious, and, it must be said, untruthful, and told with a savage eagerness to have them accepted. Any stroke of good fortune, any gleam of happiness for others, specially roused his envy and venom.

When all the colony was busy with Lucy's little story—and we may be sure the expatriated ladies were not slack in venting any amount of sniffs and head-tossing—Captain Filby dealt with her with by far the greatest severity. One day at Mrs. Dalrymple's, his sufferings having given him a fiendish energy, he even shocked his hostess, who had great indulgence for his humours, knowing how he was racked.

"Don't trust any of the pack here," he said;

"the sham lovers and Lotharios, who are as genuine as the noblemen that come on the stage. There's not a half-a-crown among any three of them; and on washing-day how many of 'em must lie in bed for particular reasons?"

He saw Lucy looking at him, as she always did, with an unconcealed repulsion.

"Oh yes! my good young miss. I understand you. Keep up the little delusion. Leave my card, and you yours on me. Ask your dear papa about it, when you go home. He's pretty well behind the scenes."

Lucy coloured, and drew herself up.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she said; "and you have no right to bring his name in, or to be so free with me or with him."

"Oh! is that the line? The dear papa! We believe in him to the end, of course. He's immaculate."

"To me he is," she said, calmly, and, as Mrs. Dalrymple described it, looking through the captain, "and that is enough. How kind, how polite, how becoming of you to slander him to his daughter!"

"Come now," said the captain, with a forced laugh, "my good Miss Lucy, keep that for your mamma or for Pringle."

"Neither," went on Lucy, with the same calm tone and look, but flushing up a great deal, "do I know of any behaviour on my side that justified your addressing me so familiarly. Unless, indeed, the wretched necessity which forces us to stay here exposing us to freedoms from those who are mere strangers;" and she swept away from the room, leaving the amazed Filby to roll his eyes and mutter:

"Infernal impertinence that, to put up with from a forward little brat!"

After this rebuff, which Mrs. Dalrymple and her daughters could not help enjoying a little, more from amusement at Lucy's spirit than from any hostility to the captain, we may conceive he had not the most amiable feelings towards her. The pains became also much more acute, and his stories about the young girl seemed to reflect every pang. He would say: "A regular intriguing miss as ever was turned out of a French school. They teach 'em all those demure faces and innocent tricks at so much a quarter, like the music. I tell you I have seen girls all the world over, and that's as deep and scheming a creature as ever made up to a *parti*. It's shocking! But watch a

little, and you will see. Pairs don't go loitering down the end of the pier for nothing, with only an old fish-woman sitting on a wall. If I had a daughter, I know—which, God be praised, I have not—I wouldn't have such tricks going on."

The captain, too, would have stories also much more circumstantial, the coinage of which were favoured by Lucy's bold and confident behaviour before the community, and whose contemptuous looks, as she passed leaning on the arm of the man she thought the most perfect in the world, seemed to challenge and defy their remarks. This little folly produced ill fruits, and though Vivian was inclined to draw back and check such unnecessary displays, Lucy's impetuosity quite overcame his prudence. Her character was, indeed, opening every day, and acquiring a charming piquancy that was dramatic and attractive, and she was learning rapidly to take responsibility and rely upon herself. Thus the handsome man and the pretty English "mees" went about together, were met far off on long walks over the chalk hills, along an endless expanse of trunk lid country, bare, and worn, and whence they could look down on the sea. Sometimes of a fine evening they were passed at the end of the pier, in the darkness, watching the fishing-boats going out for the night.

"Nice work all this, ain't it?" Captain Filby would say.

Lucy having an instinct of these whispers, would not have abated a single walk, a single incident; and her look of scorn, and defiance, and contempt, as she passed the captain, galled that veteran bitterly.

Our Lucy was triumphant in this course of hers. She seemed to think that defiance won a victory over the mean, tattling creatures of the place. In reality, her whole victory was merely in not hearing what they said. But she was to be awakened.

One morning Mr. West came down, to the surprise of the two women for whom he rose with more interest than did the sun, with a calm cheerfulness. He even read the newspaper, which had long lain there neglected. He read them out scraps of English news, and speculated about what was going to happen in politics.

"I see," he said abruptly, and smiling, "you are wondering I am so sensible to-day. I do feel more rational this morning—more like a man, less like a donkey. What must you have been thinking of me all this time, when I have been behaving like an elderly school-boy?"

Constance struck in, eagerly: "We don't think so. Oh, if you knew how we pitied and felt for you, and wished we could share your trouble and suffering."

"I know that," he said; "and I have been very indifferent to all your sympathy. But there is great allowance to be made. Once this madness gets hold of one, there is no arguing, no sense nor logic in the business. Time and suffering are the only remedy. Suf-

fering! You see, I still talk the old folly. But henceforth, I trust—Well, do you know where I was last night?"

Margaret answered bluntly: "I suppose dismally patrolling along the pier, looking out at the sea."

"Wrong for once, Margaret; but right so far, that I was going there when I passed that old church, which was all lit up, and seemed to be actually trembling with the music inside. I stopped for a moment and looked in."

"You looked in?" said Margaret, who was a stern puritan.

He had indeed been passing by, when he heard the music, and met the people coming—principally young girls, who were being prepared for confirmation when the bishop should come round. He stood at the door, looking round the old yellow church, half in light, half in gloom, and now deserted. Presently, he saw a confessional door open, and the curé of the place—a sharp-faced, grey-haired M. Giles, a picturesque figure—come out, and cross the church. West had a slight acquaintance with this clergyman, whom the English, true to their caste, kept in his place as a Roman Catholic, but who, indeed, was not conscious of this neglect, and who had not time even to think of acquaintances; for he had a laborious life among the fishermen of the place, and was known for many gentle, charitable, and unobtrusive acts. Strangers had often noticed the spare figure, with the iron-grey locks and rusty gown, flitting round street corners as the darkness fell, on some good errand. For him Mr. West had always felt a deep interest, as though there was something genuine in that mass of falsity which made up the colony. As the abbé passed, he stopped and nodded to the Englishman with a very sweet smile.

"We have done for the night," he said. "It is time to go home."

"You must be tired," said West; "is there no one to help you?"

"To be sure," said the other, rubbing his hands. "There is my coadjutor, who does ten times the work, and has the knack of getting through more with only the same trouble, and doing it quite as well. Believe me, my dear Monsieur Vaist," said the abbé, stopping before him and looking earnestly at him, "work is our guardian angel; and the more work we have, the more blessings we have. 'Laborare est orare;' and when we have plenty to do, we have no time to think of the little trials and troubles which half the world fancies are breaking its heart."

There was something so friendly and significant in the way in which this was spoken, that West could not but understand.

"Ah, but you have your calling, M. l'Abbé, and do not belong to the world."

"But you, too, have you not your calling at home, in which I hear you have eminence? And as it seems to me," he added, with a smile, "you are as much out of the world as I am. Are you going home? Let us come to the

pier, where my poor fishermen are, and which I think is as favourite a walk of yours as it is of mine. I should have been a sailor, if I had not been what I am. The sea is the purest thing on this earth."

West remained silent. He felt a curious charm in listening to this clergyman.

"I speak freely," said the abbé, "because our cloth has that privilege. But I remember your kindly and secret charity to that poor French lady and her daughters. I dare say you thought no one here knew it. It was that which made me take interest in M. Vaist and his family, though I am afraid your sister—No matter. It is that interest which makes me speak a little freely, as I would to one of my flock, and say how distressed I am to see you so changed."

West smiled bitterly. "Ah! I see! I suppose the story has reached you. I dare say you are amused. But, as you have learned by this time, it is easy to advise, easy to convince a fool of his folly; but he remains a fool still."

"It is human nature, dear sir; yes, the nature of morning, noon, and night; of every month and every year. Alas! sir, with us, who sit and listen to the weaknesses, sins, and sorrows, it is only the old, old story. With our French here," he added, with a sigh, "it all runs to that one song—women, men, girls, youths—misery, ruin, or what they fancy misery and ruin, all coming from what they call love. My dear sir, you will not be angry with me: at least I speak to a practical, sensible Englishman—"

West almost startled him by a loud laugh. "Practical and sensible, indeed! But, my good abbé, it is of no use—with me, at least."

"I would not say to you," continued the abbé, gently, "what I would say to others—to pray; pray hard, and long, and fast. *That* is the simplest remedy of all. You do not belong to us. But I would repeat, 'Laborare est orare'—work, occupation, interest. A little exertion—only a little—and the thing is begun; and what is begun is half done. Love! never was there anything so unreal. It is all *ourselves*. We think it is all for another. It is a mere tone and temper of the mind—all selfish, I am afraid—a dream, a phantom. I am your friend, and have a privilege," he added, touching his hands. "I have dealt with thousands—with men of your standing, and have treated them with that medicine, *laborare*. For a few days it is irksome, bitter; but, believe one who has experience, it will succeed. Go about, enjoy the blessings of life, lay out your day, take your share in what is going on about you, and you will find yourself drawn into being interested. Then go to your own home; leave this place—a little unworthy of you; follow your noble profession. There is an old man's talisman. It will not fail. Good night, dear M. Vaist."

West wrung his hand and thanked him. Those earnest words had inspired him with confidence. He seemed to awake. "It is contemptible, and he was right. It is a selfish

and personal thing. I have been behaving like a boy. In love with a child! They all have the story, it seems. Good Heavens, that I should have had so little care for my own dignity and self-respect! What folly! What a dream! 'Laborare est orare.' He is right, and there can be no harm trying."

He went to rest with that chime in his ears. He slept better, and came down, as we have seen, with a hope and purpose in his face.

After breakfast he went out, saw gaily dressed peasants and fishermen walking in one direction, and, asking the reason, was told it was the Fair of St. Peray. Here was acceptable news! Here was something to interest him; and he set off to the little show with cheerfulness and purpose.

"I shall make a day of it," he called out cheerfully, "and spend two or three hours. Then we shall go and see the packet come in, and—what do you say?—dine at the table d'hôte of the Royal, and show a little life and human nature to Constance."

"Blessings on that good abbé!" said Constance, devoutly. "His prayers have done this." And though a faint shade of sternness passed over Margaret's face at his name, she said, graciously, "He is a very good man, I believe." The Calvinism passed away. He left two happy women behind.

#### CHAPTER XXV. THE FAIR.

On that same morning, Vivian, who was fast regaining his strength and nearly restored, only growing a little fatigued towards the end of the day, came across joyfully. "That charming little Mrs. Jaques tells me there is to be a fair at the village; and she has got Jaques a holiday, and they are going off so smart and brilliant! We must go too: it will amuse you."

Lucy delighted in an expedition of this sort, and clapped her hands with enthusiasm. "Oh, we must go," she cried. "I would not miss it for the world."

"What is it, my hero?" said Mr. Dacres, entering. "There is some fun up, I am sure. Out with it, Vivy! Tell yours to command—"

"Only think, Harco, a fair, a little fair, out at St. Peray. Shan't we go? Oh, we must."

"Must me no musts, miss," answered Dacres, sternly. "So there's a fair, is there? 'None but the *brave* deserve the fair'—eh, colonel? That's neat. Good jury-box wit."

"But what do you say, Harco?"

"Go, of course, my podgets. In this dry sandy valley we call life, it has been my maxim never to pass such little scraps and patches of grass as we may meet. Let us three make a party and go."

So they did, and set off. It was a charming day, bright and cheerful, lightening even the monotonous French high road along which they walked for a short time. Presently they struck into the fields, which, indeed, about here, were pleasantly cut up with tracks and footpaths, the farmers about being pastoral, and good natured also. The fair was four or five miles away,

and they met many of the country people in their best and most theatrical dress, hurrying to have their little innocent enjoyment. The three walked on together, and Lucy said she was now so happy. Mr. Dacres's companionship, however, was but of a fitful sort, for as they passed a little auberge he complained of fatigue, and, greatly admiring "the quiet peace and innocence" of the spot, would protest he must have just "two seconds" on the bench under the tree, and would pick them up at the next field. This he certainly did, much more exhilarated. In truth, the two lovers—they may wear that old-fashioned official name—did not miss him. They were busy with that one absorbing topic, which for such a pair has a vast height, depth, and width, that embraces the whole world.

"I am so happy to-day," said Lucy, dancing rather than walking, as she spoke. "I feel as if I were going to enjoy myself. Ah! What a delightful world it is! So kind—so amiable—so pretty! What do they mean—our clergymen—by saying it is hollow and false, and all that?"

He smiled, and then sighed. "I used to think so too, and I used to be timorous for the future. I dreaded what might come; but now I have learned to enjoy the present, and shut my eyes to whatever may come."

"Haven't you heard papa talking of that?" she went on, with animation. "He says we don't half discount all our amusements. He puts it so funnily: 'Twenty per cent, old pictures, twenty more, lumps of coal, fifty per cent in poisonous wine or an old gig: these representing our sorrows, there remains only ten per cent in real cash for our joys.' Papa has such droll fancies."

"Ever so many of those bills have been discounted for me," he said, sadly. "There is one nearly due now, and only a week or so to run—"

"You are not thinking of that?" said Lucy, anxiously. "You don't mind what papa says—it is all his love, his interest for me. I understand you, and know what is on your mind. Men cannot understand each other so well."

"But you do not, dearest, I fear," he said, "and you cannot, either. I dare not tell you everything which I ought. And yet what right have I to ask you to take anything on trust?"

"What right?" said Lucy, seriously. "Do you mean that I would not accept your saying you had a great and necessary reason without knowing it?"

"Ah, yes, Lucy; but it is not fair to you, it is not loyal, it is not honourable. Yet what *can* I do? I vow here to Heaven I am helpless! You know how I love you, and what I would do for you; and yet what must I seem, what must you think of me, if I am obliged to—"

"Do you whatever you think right," said Lucy, enthusiastically. "Whatever you must do, I can trust, I can believe in you, and can believe, too, there is some necessary and honourable reason."

"I knew that," he said, looking at her with infinite sadness. "And if I was forced, as I may be, to leave this," he added, slowly, "for

two years or more—for there is no knowing—"

Lucy's face fell.

"Ah, am I asking too much?"

"No," she said, passionately, "it was not that. But not to see you all that time."

He smiled, and looked down fondly on her. "No matter what the discount, as your father says, I am content. Let me enjoy the present, and not trouble myself with what may never happen. But whatever takes place, whatever step I am driven to, I may trust that you will still believe me; at least, that you will not think the worst, but at least wait; and, as I live, time will clear all up!"

Lucy looked a little anxious, but her bright face was clear in a moment. "I promise—I swear," she said, and put her hand in his, "I engage. After all, there is no merit in confidence where there is nothing to doubt."

"Yet we shall be so happy," he said, with exultation. "We shall enjoy ourselves to-day."

Now came up Mr. Dacres, trollying to himself about the "Lass of Killiney," a lady whose charms he sang with much feeling and many trills and turns.

"Through night and its shadows,  
Through mornings so shiny,

I'm mournfully seeking

The lass of Killiney—

Kill-i-i-ney,

The bee-yoo-tiful lass of Killiney."

A woodcutter in sabots looked after him with grave amazement, not at the singing, but at the mournful tones and pathetic shaking of the head.

"Well, my chick-a-biddies—how the dust flies! The little cogs and springs of my voice want oiling a little. Ah, if you saw me at the assize-dinner, when the cloth was drawn, and that old raven Jackson, Q.C., croaks out that he wants the 'Lass of Killiney!' I make her roll up the table and down again. I give her to 'em with a vengeance. But I can't do these feats here. The human voice, sir, must be fattened and made rich, as you would cattle on its native pasture. Yet, take me as I am, Lulu—rusty, gone to seed—hungering and thirsty for a draught of my own native air, you might back Papa Harco against the best shouter of 'em all in their best catty concert."

They reached the little village in something over an hour's time. The sound of the drum and flute directed them to a field close by, which was all bustle, frolic, motion, and shifting colours. There were tents, and booths, and waggons, after the English race-course pattern; but the whole had a gayer and more theatrical air.

"Save us, Lulu, just look at the merry-go-rounds! Why, they're going by steam!"

To see half a dozen small wooden horses, of the very gayest skins, with long-legged and perhaps corpulent riders, flying round after each other at a headlong speed, each taking off a small ring on his "maringspike" as



he shoots by, has all the air and excitement of a real race—adding also the grotesque attitudes, the sprawling, the looking back, the exultations, and the comic remarks of the riders. Lulu laughed with delight at the comic and childish antics of the full-grown French men and women, whose whole souls were absorbed in their pastime.

Now came up the parti-coloured old women in queer caps, and yellow and scarlet shawls, and with what seemed real drums on their backs, which, when opened mysteriously, as drums never were, drew crowds of children eager for the delicious banquet of cakes seen stored within. Lulu was invited a thousand times over, and with many a significant speech, to purchase these dainties. Surely her handsome gentleman—her splendid gentleman—he would buy for his lovely sweetheart—a pair made for each other, and would live together happily, and see the loveliest and most blooming family in the world grow up about them! These rustic compliments, delivered in a shrill tone, and heard by all around, made Lucy blush, and Vivian smile. Mr. Dacres would have burst into one of his loud laughs of enjoyment had he been there, but he had “slipped off into a cool place.” The pair, indeed, did not miss him. A party of two, as Mr. Dacres himself would have said, is “much more handy to work,” is more compact and rounded off; and Lucy and her lover went about from this eccentricity to that. Here was the woman in the cart selling drugs and cures, and speaking with a fluency that amazed Lulu. Here were little shops where the most flimsy but elegant toys and trifles were sold: gaudy and gay and cheerful as butterflies, but with not nearly so long a life, and which gradually fell to pieces, to Lulu’s amazement, as she carried them about. There, were yet greater delights—a little menagerie, with one bear, as the *pièce de résistance*, a theatre, and an exhibition of highly trained dogs and monkeys, which Vivian had seen somewhere and recognised, and pronounced would be well worth a visit.

It was quite a happy holiday. Then they went away and walked in the green lanes. Many remarked the handsome gentleman and pretty girl on his arm, and gentle women’s eyes followed them and marked his fond look as his face was turned to hers, and hers looking up so trustfully at his, and who talked to each other with interest. But presently two mariners, who had walked over from the port, and who had witnessed the scene of the rescue, told a rustic or two, and Lucy soon discovered that her hero was being followed with admiring looks of curiosity, and even heard some of those rapturous soliloquies with which French women express their admiration of chivalry. She was proud indeed.

Towards the afternoon they returned to the fair, wondering not a little what had become of Mr. Dacres. Suddenly she thought she heard his cheerful voice, and, turning round, actually saw Harco, a “marlingspike” in one hand, flying round, mounted on a very garish cob,

dappled vermilion and white all over, like a clown’s trousers. He was in great spirits and exhilaration, his coat-tails flying out, and was calling to the centre of motion to get on faster, faster, and turning round every moment to a stout grizzly Frenchman behind, with a very open collar. Papa Harco nodded to Lucy pleasantly as he flew by. “Ah! Lu, if I had only my wig and gown here!”

After he had dismounted, he came to them, with his arm in that of the stout Frenchman. “That’s what I call sport; next door to a kill in the open with hounds. I say, Vivian, if some of the circuit lads saw this! Egad, I am in such feather, I’d play leapfrog with my Lord Chief Justice himself. By the way, let me introduce Colonel Pepin—a fine man, sir. Soldiers should know each other.”

The “ancient colonel in retreat” (Mr. Dacres was often very droll on this description, which was the colonel’s own—“couldn’t he say *retired* at once?”) bowed stiffly and with disdain to Vivian; but smiled and simpered at Lucy with infinite homage. This was, indeed, the introduction he wanted. This officer was quite egg-shaped as to figure, and his head and neck together made up the shape of a Jersey pear. His throat was in creases. Yet, like every Frenchman of every time of life and condition, he thought himself handsome, captivating, and irresistible. Vivian he dismissed as a poor creature.

“We’re all to dine together,” said Papa Harco. “The colonel, who is very strong in that line, will look after the ordering. I’ll back him for as good a spread as ever adorned the snowy damask. He guarantees the vintages too.

Wine, wine, liquor divine,  
And served by the loveliest Hebe of mine!”

He often talked, later, of an amusing French colonel, whom he “had picked up out riding.”

But Vivian understood the retired French colonel perfectly. He said, coldly and firmly, that he was sorry, but they must go home, as it would be dark soon.

“Oh yes, papa,” said Lucy, eagerly, “you know we must go. Though,” she added, wistfully, “it is very pleasant here.”

“Is monsieur delicate, or afraid of catching a cold?” said the colonel “in retreat,” contemptuously. “Why, the amusement is only beginning.”

“You are quite right,” said Vivian, gravely. “I am afraid. But, apart from that, Miss Dacres wishes to return.”

“Not she,” said Mr. Dacres, getting more into the spirit of the thing every moment. “Why, we’ve to spread the board yet, and wreath the bowl. We must have something. Nature, bounteous mother, sir, can’t live upon air. I am as empty as an Established church. No! no!

Wine! wine! nectar divine.

Come, do stay, Lulu. I can’t go back, you know, when I have once begun. I’ve laid my-

self out, you know. I don't find myself in spirits in this sort of way often."

"Oh, then we must stay," said Lucy, eagerly. "What harm? Poor Harco," she whispered to Vivian, "his heart is set on it."

They did stay. So the pleasant day went by, the excitable Mr. Dacres overflowing with spirits. By-and-by he stopped to speak to Lucy, drawing her aside with mystery.

"I say, Lulu love, was that West cruising about here? You did not meet him?"

"No, dear."

"Because I'd have sworn I saw his hang-dog face looking out from behind a bush, like a Sambo in a jungle. But he was gone when I looked again. Maybe it was imagination—the baseless fabric of a vision."

Vivian turned quickly.

"He is not come to *that*, I hope," he said, angrily. "He is not turned spy, surely?"

### THE BUTCHER.

FROM the cattle market to the butcher's shop is only a step, but it costs a good deal, especially to the West-end customer. The model butcher's shop is situated in some great thoroughfare. It commands not only a first-rate list of customers, whose red books pass through the hands of butchers, housekeepers, or professed cooks, but also a lively ready-money "cutting business," when the lamps are lighted, and the thrifty wives of clerks and working-men walk out, basket in hand and money in purse, to make a personal inspection of the dead meat shows, intent on getting bargains. Such a butcher carefully studies the tastes of all classes of customers, and provides for quantity as well as quality. He expects his journeyman to have swept the boards and hooks pretty clean when the late closing movement takes place on a Saturday night. The clever journeyman butcher is not second to his genteel but more effeminate rival, the haberdasher, in his powers of persuasion; indeed, next to a knowledge of buying, the journeyman, who is to rise into a master, more needs the voluble art of selling bargains.

Our model butcher commences his week's work at four or five o'clock on every Monday morning. Accompanied by his lad, he drives to the metropolitan market, to lay in the principal stock for the week. We will presume that the time of the year is the early winter, when cold weather has driven his best customers home from the sea-side, the Highlands, or the Continent, and there is no longer, as in summer, daily fear that a change in the weather may destroy the whole stock of the shop in a single night—a serious item in a butcher's trade expenses—so he may buy bravely.

His first steps are bent to the part of the market where, on an average throughout the year, five thousand cattle of one kind or another, from the primest Scot or Devon oxen to the poorest Prussian cow, or the leanest Polish

harness-bullock, are ranged for his inspection most conveniently in regular lanes, on, perhaps, the bleakest, coldest spot that could have been selected in the whole metropolis. On this bleak hill, in the course of a year, over eighteen millions sterling pass from the butchers to the salesmen in the purchase of cattle, sheep, calves, and pigs.

In winter the supply comes from the yards and stalls of Scotland, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and all the counties where roots are well cultivated, and farmers have capital to buy cake. The foreigners, before the cattle plague, often provided half the supply. The best came in summer from Holstein (called Tonnings, from the port of shipment), and from dairy-feeding Normandy, and the grass districts of Brittany, these being Short-horn crosses, and standing next in value to the Scots. But, in winter, the importation of grass-fed beasts, either from our own pasture counties or the Continent, ceases; the supply is kept up by cattle under shelter, fed on dry food and roots. These include the produce of the best farms in England and Scotland, and poor lean cattle of the Continent, drafts from barness and the dairy, called in the trade Prussians, but coming from districts as widely apart as Mecklenburg and Magdeburg!

Before the Cattle Plague Commission, a German salesman, who does one of the largest trades in the market, said: "I had cattle from Galicia, which were twelve days coming. I sold fifty for twenty-five pounds apiece to two persons at Bristol, who came for pure white beasts, for they said 'they are as fat as any we have ever seen.'" This gentleman imported four hundred beasts a week, and about two thousand sheep. The Hungarian cattle came chiefly by way of Bavaria to Mayence and up the Rhine; the Podolian and Galician by rail to Hamburg.

Our butcher will first select the beef for his best customers—his red-book customers. So many smallish, well-fed—not too young—that, when killed, will all be called Scotch beef, although the lot may include some Devons and even first-class Welsh. He will then pick out some large beasts—Short-horns or Herefords, or, more likely, Short-horn crosses of Polled Scots. The Polled Scot is very prime beef, and large, too. In our fathers' times, he was a wild, rough, rather long-legged customer, seldom killed before five years old. Care, selection, stall-feeding, and some suspected crosses, have made him, at two years old, plump, sleek, fine-boned, and still capital beef. These, in trade terms, "die well," and are the butcher's favourites, for there is more profit to be made out of the huge joints, although the quality and the nominal price may fall below the older and smaller beasts. Finally, to accommodate all pockets, he may invest in one or two low-priced foreigners, for the "cutting butcher" does not forget that when he sells a joint, "bone is paid for at the price of meat."

The beasts bargained for and bought, the purchaser marks them with his private mark, and

the drover takes his perquisite by cutting off the hair of their tails. There were a great many other forms to be observed while the cattle plague was rife, which we omit. Paying is the next step, and that is conducted on principles of honour which those who only believe in long, complicated, legal agreements, can scarcely understand. The purchaser goes to the salesman-banker (all the cattle bankers have their offices under the clock-tower at the metropolitan cattle market); pays so much money for so many beasts, and returning, in ordinary cases, for his herd, receives delivery of his purchases without a scrap of writing passing; only exceptionally is an inquiry made to the banker whether the butcher has paid. In the course of the year, when, as before stated, eighteen millions sterling change hands, a case of fraud is almost unknown—a fact that speaks well for the general honesty of the London butchers.

From the cattle department our butcher turns to sheep, and makes his selection on the same principles. For the customers who understand and pay for quality, he purchases Downs, or the best half-breds—Shropshire Downs and Oxford Downs of great size are to be met with at times almost equal to the best pure Sussex. Then for quantity he takes some longwools, Leicesters, Lincolns, Cotswolds—good Dutch sheep which, in effect, are Holsteins, with a strong English longwool cross. Butchers with a large ready-money trade amongst the labouring classes, like a big sheep—the wife likes a large shoulder of mutton. If the neighbourhood is very poor, he may buy some German Merinos; he can sell them at twopence or threepence a pound cheaper than better animals, and, though dear at the money in the abstract, they afford meat meals to those who otherwise would go without any meat at all. For his best customers, the butcher snaps up, if he has the chance, any three-year-old wethers that may have been fed for fancy in some gentleman's domain. As a rule, farmers do not feed English sheep beyond fourteen months, but they are well fed, and mutton is, on the average, better than what our grandfathers ate.

The day's supply selected—for we won't enter into the mysteries of the calf market, and pigs belong to the pork butcher—the drover next appears upon the scene. He is a stout fellow, not very neat in his person, nor nice in his language, with a public character for brutality. But when it is so (and there are remarkable exceptions), society is more to be blamed than the drover. Until very lately, the drover has had to get his living in all weathers, at most uncomfortable hours, by conducting from place to place animals whose vagaries would often upset the temper of an educated and fresh, much more of an uneducated and weary man, with many enemies and no friends amongst the class who employ him.

As every bruise on a beast or sheep is a serious drawback to its selling value, drovers

who injure the stock entrusted to them soon lose their best customers. Something has been done by the badge system, by summonses and fines to discourage drovers' brutality; but more good seems likely to be brought about by a recently formed Metropolitan Drovers' Benefit Society, which, founded by a few sensible and benevolent salesmen, aims at raising the self-respect of a class who, in their way, are as indispensable as postmen or engine-drivers. The object of the promoters has been, besides establishing a relief fund to provide a weekly allowance for drovers in case of sickness, to encourage frugality, and to discourage cruelty and coarse language. With this view a club-house has been opened—where tea, coffee, and soup may be had, as well as books and newspapers—outside the market. It is to be regretted that the publican interest in the Common Council has hitherto been strong enough to prevent the drovers' club-house from obtaining a roof in one of the empty useless buildings within the cattle market.

The next step is to slaughter the stock purchased; and this brings us to the disputed question of public or private slaughter-houses.

A public slaughter-house is an indispensable adjunct of every great cattle market; but a private slaughter-house near the butcher's shop, if properly built, well drained, and well supplied with a force of water, is a much more economical arrangement for the butcher, and consequently for his customers. There have been private slaughter-houses which were abominable nuisances, wanting in all the materials for cleanliness; but at the present time, when there is a demand for every kind of offal of beast, sheep, or calf, there is no reason why a slaughter-house, with proper construction and management, should be more a nuisance than a stable. With a private slaughter-house a butcher does not kill until the moment that suits him—a matter of importance in hot summers, and close autumn nights; he is also safe from the pilfering of loose fat that goes on when a number of strange men are collected together. The eatable offal is neatly taken out, and conveyed to his shop in a clean fresh state, and the carcasses, having been first properly and slowly cooled down, do not suffer in transit from a distance. To sell meat to the best advantage, it is absolutely essential that the butcher should make the most of the loose fat, the heart, the lights, the liver, the stomach, the intestines, and the blood. The offal of a bullock is worth from two pounds to fifty shillings; of a sheep, from fourteen shillings to a pound. Half of each of these sums is likely to be lost in the rough work of a public slaughter-house. At a slaughter-house, besides the pilferage of fat, the butcher is obliged to sell the eatable offal, which is often thrown on a dirty heap, to a wholesale contractor, while at home he would retail it at a retail price, and, consequently, be able to make a proportionate reduction on all the other parts of the same animal. A butcher doing a large trade in a poor neighbourhood puts down his loss on the offal of sixty

sheep, lumped wholesale, at not less than two pounds to three pounds a week, for which, of course, his customers pay. Some persons during the restrictions of the cattle plague ignorantly proposed that all the supply of London should be furnished by a dead meat trade. Even supposing that our climate would permit the importation and railway conveyance of dead meat to take place in summer, autumn, and spring, it would be an arrangement most injurious to the interests of the working classes of London.

The arguments against undue encouragement of the dead meat trade, which also apply to any unnecessary concentration of slaughter-houses in the metropolitan market, are very well put in a pamphlet issued in support of a market and quarantine for foreign cattle on the Thames:

"There are powerful reasons why the dead meat trade should receive no special encouragement in London.

"London is not only the residence of the most wealthy, but also the very poorest classes.

"Every day there arrives in London a small army of poor labouring folks, who fly to the metropolis as a city of refuge, where work of some kind is always supposed to be, and generally is to be, had. These people, many of whom eventually arrive at a condition of employment which is to them affluence, found, before the advent of the cattle plague, some compensation for the dearness of lodgings in the cheapness of food, and especially of meat. Under ordinary circumstances, London has the cheapest food-markets in Europe, as compared with average wages, for those who buy with money in their hands. This cheapness in a great degree arises from the facility with which they can obtain all qualities of meat and what is called the offal, but which, in reality, includes some light, very nutritious, and even delicate parts of the animals slaughtered, as well as meat of varying qualities; for beef may be wholesome without being the produce of Highland Scots; and mutton from a Dutch or Merino sheep will feed a family that cannot afford South-down legs or loins.

"The head and pluck, that is, liver and heart, of a sheep is sold by large butchers for two shillings; with the addition of a small piece of bacon, it will make a nutritious and cheap dinner for six or seven persons.

"Sheep's feet sold with the skin form a considerable article of food.

"So, again, a bullock's head, worth three shillings, and a heart worth two shillings, are amongst the articles of cheap food in London.

"Every sheep and every beast slaughtered on the continent of Europe, and sent dead to London, is a sacrifice, not only of a considerable amount of food kept back from the best market, but of a quantity of raw material which can be sold at a better price, and worked up into manufactured articles more advantageously in London than anywhere else. An increase of dead meat trade not only deprives the labouring poor of a supply of cheap animal food, but of

employment in making up the hides, skins, &c., into a manufactured article.

"A sheepskin is worth from ten shillings to sixteen shillings. The feet that go with it contain bones with which the handles of knives are made. The entrails are manufactured into a variety of uses. Even the blood, which is usually the perquisite of the slaughterer, is valuable to sugar-bakers and manure-manufacturers.

"It must, therefore, be remembered, that every beast and every sheep sent to London in the form of meat, which formerly came alive, involves a loss of fourteen shillings of valuable material of food in a sheep, and of from forty shillings to fifty shillings in a bullock.

"Philanthropic professors of medical science too often forget that every restriction on the movement and management of a manufactured article is a tax. Restrictions may be necessary—there are cases where they are indispensable. The orders in council which restricted the movement of cattle during the time that the cattle plague raged, were a very serious but essential and inevitable tax on meat. We cannot afford in London to make meat unnecessarily dear."\*

There are, however, many districts of the metropolis where, from the value of the property, it is not possible for private slaughter-houses to exist; therefore it would be well, instead of trying to centralise the killing business in the metropolitan market for the especial benefit of the public-house interest, to establish a sufficient number of district slaughter-houses on the most approved principles for light, drainage, ventilation, water supply, and general arrangement, with the special object of enabling the butchers of each district to have as short a distance as possible to traverse between the slaughter-houses and their shops. These abattoirs to be under the control of a public officer, but to be let to each butcher for use at fixed fees, under strict regulations.

The beast and sheep slain and dressed being ready to be cut up, the selling process—the most important of all—comes next. Here at once arises the question of price. Why is meat dearer than thirty years ago, in spite of enormous importations from every stock-feeding district of Europe—in spite of railroads, which have facilitated the supply to our great cities—in spite of improvements in breeding and feeding, which have diminished by one-half the average time for ripening a bullock, and by two-thirds the production of fat mutton?

The first cause is to be found in the improved condition of the working classes all over civilised Europe, and especially in this country—an improvement first proved by an increased demand for more meat and whiter bread.

"Forty years ago, many well-meaning people wasted their time and money in circulating tracts and giving lectures, for the purpose of teaching

\* Why have a Foreign Cattle Market on the Thames? By James Odams.



the labouring classes how to cook and make the most of coarse and cheap food.

"Instructions were given for feeding a whole family on vegetable soup, or a stew slightly flavoured with the bones from the table of Dives. At that time, and even later, we were under the panic of over-population. There were grave apprehensions that the whole property of the kingdom would be eaten up by poor-rates.

"These apprehensions are things of the past. It is now universally admitted that we have more reason to fear emigration than over-population—an artificial rise of wages than a glut of labour. Nothing is more certain than that the labouring classes, who are the millions, will now have meat more in quantity and better in quality than what used once to satisfy them."

Again, the cattle plague has made a frightful blank. In March of this year the Privy Council reported that in twenty months nearly two hundred and fifty-four thousand cattle had perished, and over fifty thousand healthy beasts had been slain to arrest the spread of the plague. Graziers became disinclined to meddle with a description of stock so hazardous, and went boldly into sheep-breeding. An eminent Norfolk farmer—after travelling the length and breadth of England early in this year on an agricultural inquiry—declared that in all the counties he visited "he did not see so many fat bullocks as he had left in West Norfolk, while the country positively stunk of sheep."

There is another cause for the steady dearness of beef that has not, we believe, been ever mentioned in print. Butchers buy live beef by guess, relying for a considerable share of their profits on the loose fat and hide. But these are quite a lottery. The most experienced butcher may be mistaken by many stones in his estimate of a bullock's fat, for oxen have deteriorated in weight as the breeds have grown finer. The old-fashioned breeds—of which you may hear venerable butchers talk with rapture—fattered slowly in five or six years, and contained treasures of loose fat, with good thick hides, affording a large profit to the man who bought four quarters and sold up five.

The beasts of modern times, pushed to maturity at under three years, "do not die" nearly so well as their unimproved ancestors.

For these reasons, the days of cheap beef are gone, and for ever. But, even with these allowances, the retail prices at the West-end of the town do not seem to fit fairly with the wholesale returns. And yet in this steady balance against the customer there is nothing very extraordinary when it is examined.

The butcher is one of the few tradesmen who, in the face of an apparently unlimited competition (there are four thousand butchers in London), fixes his own prices and settles his own profits, as far as a very large class of his customers is concerned. Our grandmothers

went to market, and knew the current price of everything; they chaffered and bargained as ladies of considerable fortune do still in the provincial towns of France and Germany. Our ladies of London cannot now go to market, and those who have a personal interview with the butcher are an exception. The rule is a red book, in which the weights sent by the butcher are accepted by the cook or housekeeper, or by any other grander person who rules the roast and boiled, the stewed and fried.

This book, very careful housewives—quite the exception—inspect once a week; others, once a month; many glance at it once a quarter, and a great many once a year, when the totals only are examined, grumbled at, and paid. The greater the consumption, the less the attention paid to details. Weights and prices are left to cook or housekeeper, who in mild cases expects a handsome Christmas-box from the butcher, but in the majority of establishments takes a regular "poundage." That is the term familiar to the trade. The kitchen-maid also expects something, and the butler, if he pays the bills, a handsome consideration.

How few there are who dare change the butcher, the poulterer, and the fishmonger, without the permission of a favourite cook!

This system destroys the butcher's conscience, if he had any to start with. We should not trust cabmen to fix their own fares. We do not hesitate to change our bootmaker, our tailor, and our hosiery, if we can afford to pay their bills; but we leave the butcher to fix his own prices, with the slight check of a servant, whose perquisites are increased in proportion to the gross amount of the bills.

You can tell if a boot or a coat fits you, you can compare notes with your friends. But not one in ten of the well-bred classes, male or female, knows anything about the quality of beef or mutton until it is cooked—not always then—yet quality makes a difference of twopence to threepence per pound. The whole system of meat bought cheap, and sold dear, by the butcher, rests on the ignorance of housewives, the perquisites of cooks, and long unchecked credit.

The value of cash to a butcher will be found the moment you look into the cutting, or ready-money trade, and notice the prices at which those who know how to go to market lay in their provisions for the week. You will find the cutting butcher selling legs of mutton—perhaps not all wether legs—at sevenpence-halfpenny, when to his more genteel credit customers he is charging ninepence and tenpence. At the same time, it must be understood that, without trade knowledge, it is quite impossible to form an idea of what should be the fair price of the prime pieces, judging from a quotation of the wholesale prices. For instance, you pay a shilling a pound for the best loin chops, and, hearing that whole loins are sold in Newgate Market at sevenpence-halfpenny a pound, it seems a robbery; but buy a loin at that price, cut off the tail, the flap, the two wing-chops, and trim

the fat off the back, then cut two pounds of chops at a shilling a pound, weigh what you have left, and you will find that to sell these prime trimmed chops at a shilling a pound is not a profitable transaction. Our system of plain cookery is very nice, but very extravagant. The trimmings which mutton-chops, loins, and ribs of beef undergo at the butcher's to make them presentable—a course which consumes a quantity of meat and fat that, under a more scientific system of cookery, would be turned to use—costs a great deal of money. It is common at the West-end for a butcher to first weigh ribs of beef, and then trim the joint at the expense of the purchaser.

As long as prices are moderate and money is plentiful no one complains; at length the shoe begins to pinch, and then there are very irrational protests, and still more irrational suggestions. There is no remedy but personal observation and cash payments. Co-operative societies have successfully taken in hand the supply of groceries and all sorts of dry eatables, but amateur butchering will never answer, nor deputy-butchering either. It is a trade that requires skill in buying, skill in selling all round, so as to make a good average, and a degree of zeal which no deputy will ever exert. Besides, the trade expenses are enormous; a single night will often destroy a whole shopful of meat, reducing the prime joints to the value of carrion.

In running over this subject—so interesting to all Londoners who love their dinner—so difficult to treat in a popular style—we have passed by the dead meat markets, soon to be removed from their present close and filthy quarters to a magnificent new home in West Smithfield. The dead meat market is supplied from beasts and sheep killed at the public and other slaughter-houses by carcase butchers all the year round. Consignments arrive from various parts of England, consisting often of hind-quarters, the inferior fore-quarters being consumed in the country. In the cold months, of great consignments of beef and mutton of the very best quality from Scotland, where the art of killing, cooling, and packing has been carried on to great perfection. There are very eminent butchers who kill no stock, but supply themselves entirely from the dead meat market. For what is called a short side of beef—without brisket, clod, sticking-piece, or shin—they will give an extra price of a farthing a pound. Of mutton they will buy chiefly hind-quarters. Within the last year a great trade in mutton has also been opened with Holland and North Germany. But a fuller notice of this dead meat trade may well wait until the great meat market is completed.

Our final conclusion is, that the grievance of dear meat falls chiefly on those who keep two or more servants, and is due mainly to their own mismanagement. The customers of the cutting butchers are not to be imposed on. They have other resources, and in winter the competition of Ostend rabbits and other food—

which they will eat, but which “their betters” will not—prevents any extraordinary rise in beef and mutton.

### CURRAGH COMFORTS.

CLOSE along the Curragh edge, but fully an Irish mile from the site of the camp, straggles an irregular line of low thatched cottages built in old Irish fashion. The walls are made of mud and chopped straw beaten well together; the roofs have long been covered with many-coloured lichens and mosses; the chimneys have settled down on one side; and broad black or dark-green bands mark where the rain drips down the whitewashed walls. You stoop to enter the doorway, and stand upon the earthen floor. The “ingle nook” is spacious, with an earthen or stone seat on either side under the cavernous aperture of the chimney. Here old men and women sit and smoke. The turf fire on the floor sends up a steady heat under the three-legged pot hung by a chain from a beam across the chimney. It is the duty of a child or aged person, past more laborious work, to watch the “praties” as they boil and bubble. When the skins crack, and a white floury rift appears, they will be thrown upon a table to cool. With milk, sweet or sour, and a little salt, a meal is prepared and eaten hurriedly. Off the outer room there is usually another, sometimes two rooms, of very small dimensions. In these the wooden bedstead runs up close to the old chest of drawers—an article of furniture the peasantry are fond of. Old-fashioned chests of drawers are getting scarce now, for the emigrant to America endeavours to take one with him to the new country, and those made of “real old Irish oak” are not often met with now. You can scarcely walk between the bedstead and the wall. The air is close and heavy with the vapid odour of turf smoke. The windows, of four small panes—two of them bull's-eyes—were not made to open, and scarcely admit light. The air comes through the living room outside. The roof, unceiled, displays only blackened rafters supporting still blacker thatch. Occasionally the second room is parted from the first only by a low partition, formed of rough wooden planks or clay. Overhead there is usually “a loft” stretching half across the room, and here the hens roost at night, and, stimulated by the heat, lay eggs now and then in the hardest winters—and the winters at the Curragh edge are, in truth, severe, though bracing. The walls of the two or three rooms are covered with gaudy pictures, either of religious subjects or of “Irish heroes,” the men of '93, or '48, or '67, and sometimes of celebrated race-horses which have made the Curragh trainers famous on many an English course.

Unwholesome, frouzy, cheerless dwellings these are at best; yet many a pretty girl comes hither “to pass her lawful time,” and afterwards to lodge as bride and wife; for whether the marriage is to be performed by licence or after banns,

the girl must live eight clear days within the boundaries of the parish in which the camp is situated. It is to this straggling line of cottages she comes, and rents a room, or takes a share of one with three or even four others, whether married or single. The soldier whom she followed hither runs over to see her when he can. She will do plain work or knitting, or labour afield in the proper season. The couple wait for some day when there is no parade or route march, hurry to the parish church, get married, and then often part for several days. A soldier's time is not his own, and if he marries without leave he cannot hope for "liberty" or indulgence. The wife, hardly a wife, waits hopefully for chance or fortune to place her on "the strength." That is the summit of her ambition. If her husband be well conducted, sober, and diligent, she may not have to wait long; but if he is familiar with the provost-marshal, miserable is her lot indeed. It is wonderful how some of these poor trusting girls live on in hope. A stranger would think that even death would be a release from the utter wretchedness of a few whose husbands are unkind; and yet it is a singular fact that, in five years, not a single soldier's wife committed suicide.

So long as these women have their health, their lot is tolerable. If the day be fine, they sit and work on the sweet Curragh sward, sheltered by the blossoming furze. They can see the long brown line of the camp upon the hill, and point out the very hut where the husband is on duty, or preparing for duty. They hear the roll of the drums and the bugle sound for parade or muster. "He is there—almost within reach—time will pass, and he will soon be here." She will see him to-day, perhaps, at "marching out," when the bands of all the regiments in camp are heard, now loud, now low, among the hills. The leaves have fallen from the hedgerows, festooned only with the vine-like sprays of the bramble, and decked with bright-red rose-hips. The long rampart of men in red or blue or rifle-green winds near her lodging, and her eye falls upon the place in the company where he must be. A smile and nod are all that pass between the wife and husband; but she is happy for the day. Still, many a time the flashing column marches past to the grand music of the bands, leaving behind within these stifling cottages the patient English or Irish girl whom sickness has struck down and prisoned there. In a former paper\* it was stated that soldiers' wives are divided into two classes, widely distinct. There are wives married with leave, and those, no less wives, who have ventured to marry without leave. The former are entitled to many great advantages, not the least of which is their acknowledged position as part of the regiment, and their recognition by the wives of the officers. "Liberty" to marry is now made a prize for good conduct and honourable service, and in numerous respects the state of soldiers' wives, "married with

leave," is greatly improved. The recent additions to the soldiers' pay, the abolition of many stoppages, the increased quantity and superior quality of the "rations," have all tended to render the life of a soldier's wife more comfortable. Amongst other benefits to which they are entitled is that of admission into the Female Hospital, where such an institution exists. Should there be no Female Hospital regularly constituted, an available room in barrack is set apart for those sick women or sick children the severity of whose cases requires their removal from quarters. But, whether in hospital or quarters, the recognised wives receive medical attendance and medicine. With these, they also procure what in the regulation-book appear as "medical comforts"—a phrase which means port wine, brandy, arrowroot, and essence of beef. No provision or allowance is made for nursing and attendance, but these are never wanting. Pass through the Female Hospital or invalid-room, and you will learn that human nature is not so selfish as some represent it to be. There are always willing hands and cheerful hearts ready to lighten the cares and cheer the gloom of the sick in hospital. Clanship, if the principle which actuates the wives in camp can be called by that name, is a part of our constitution, as love and anger are. The moment we belong to any special body, we defend it, and all within its pale are linked to us as friends and comrades. She who smoothes down the pillow of a comrade's wife to-day may need one to smoothe her own to-morrow. A regiment is not only a parish, but a little world in itself, and all dwelling under the same flag claim kindred. The list of articles included under "medical comforts" is a brief one; but whatever an invalid needs or wishes for—whatever she neither needs nor wishes, but which fellow-feeling thinks she would—is found somehow. Beside the medicine phial and the "comforts" will be found the plate with two or three ripe apples, an orange, a small bunch of grapes, or a few sweet-smelling flowers. Woman is self-sacrificing ever, and a soldier's wife in health will deny herself every selfish pleasure to ensure that of the sick daughter of the regiment who is "down" in hospital.

But wives "married without leave," and therefore without recognised position, cannot be admitted to hospital or the sick-room in barracks. They must bear their suffering as they can, in some thatched hut beside the Curragh edge, with its earthen floor, its smoky atmosphere, and broken windows. Yet when one of these parish-wives seeks for medical advice, what regimental physician thinks of asking her whether she had married with or without leave? It is enough that she is ill and requires some help. Advice and medicine she obtains at once, whatever be her status; but "medical comforts" and the hospital are denied her. But she is also one of a clan, and is cared for, not with similar quietude or order, but more officiously. Port wine, arrowroot, small fruits, and even

\* See vol. xviii., page 246.

flowers are found under the moss-roofed hut where the invalid remains; and if a rabbit or chicken can be obtained in any honest way, they go as a matter of right to the poor "sick girl's" room.

It is difficult to ascertain with minute accuracy statistics of the health of soldiers' wives. The sanitary condition of the soldiers can be discovered to a unit, but the condition of the women can only be approximately compared with theirs.

The number of married recognised wives in the Curragh is nearly eight thousand, and the number of sick cases in each thousand during the year is four hundred and one. Many of these cases were trifling, and yielded to medical care at once, for the death-rate among these soldiers' wives is but 7.36 per thousand. This death-rate has not always borne so low a proportion, for in 1860 it amounted to 9.33 per thousand, a ratio nearly equal to that which prevails now among the men. Ventilation, drainage, good quarters, and other improvements, have had their usual effect, and two lives have been saved every year in each thousand by a small but judicious expenditure on the married men's quarters. The superior health of the women is seen at once by comparing it with that of the men. Soldiers' cases average one hundred and three per thousand yearly, and the death-rate is 9.99. That sickness and mortality among the women may be still further reduced is evident from the fact that scarlet fever, one of those diseases which may be said to vanish before sanitary improvements, is set down as the most prevalent disorder among soldiers' families, and the most fatal of the eruptive fever class. There is, too, a striking and suggestive fact connected with the health of soldiers' wives which ought to arrest the attention of the military authorities. Three-fourths of the cases of diathetic diseases abroad, and double the proportion among men at home, are due to anæmia, or poverty of blood, a disorder which is generally the result of defective nutrition.

So, then, the small black velvet hat or bonnet with its white feathers so often washed and dried to curl before the fire, the tiny bright red petticoat, the dapper little shoes, which make the soldier's child so trig and neat, are bought by the mother's blood. The soldier's wife has a hard task ever before her to make the small amount of savings meet the cost of, oh! so many things. Her child must be a credit to her husband and herself. She must not disgrace the regiment; she must win a smile of recognition from the captain's lady; at the infant school she must rank with the neatest. But how to do it all? So the mother lives on "next to nothing." She pinches, pares, and saves, sparing no labour, and cares not how pale and bloodless are her cheeks if the face of her child be bright and ruddy.

Just forty-five years ago there lived at Berlin one John Gossner. He had been a Roman Catholic priest in Petersburg, but who became a Protestant, and was exiled. He went to Berlin,

and was pained at the sufferings endured by families crowded into a single room when one of their number was stricken with fever. He had but little means, yet he hired "a flat" in a house, and fitted it up as a hospital. Soon the neighbours objected, and John Gossner took his hat in his hand and went a-begging. There are kindly hearts in all the world if we seek for them, and John Gossner in time brought home enough to purchase a small house on the outskirts of the city. Ladies called themselves the Protestant Deaconesses of Saint Elizabeth, and nursed the sick. You cannot now see John Gossner's little hospital, for on its site rises a new and splendid building, already opened. This building is capable of holding a hundred and fifty beds. After the late war, seventy patients were admitted. The "Sisters," or "Deaconesses," are chiefly farmers' daughters, or in a similar rank of life. But high-born ladies do not hesitate to enter the hospital, and, like our own Florence Nightingale, lighten the suffering of sick soldiers or their wives. Is there a John Gossner near the Curragh to beg and buy some small house for sick soldiers' wives married without leave? Or will the time ever come when marriage shall not be a military crime?

## GENII OF THE CAVE.

THE cave is a railway-arch, and the genii are mighty modern magicians who have converted that arch into a gorgeous temple of luxury. Further, by a touch of their wand, an arid waste has become a smiling paradise, misery been turned into rejoicing, discontent to satisfaction, famine into plenty, and a social rite, hitherto repulsive and penal, made a thing of beauty and a substantial joy. Distress of mind, pain of body, loss of temper, and intemperance of language have disappeared under the beneficent sway of genii who rose from the antipodes to confer a boon on England, and who have aimed a severe blow at a tyranny under which the British railway-traveller has groaned ever since railways were. It was to the extirpation of the evils arising from this tyranny that "Mugby Junction" was especially dedicated; and it seems appropriate that the readers of this journal should be introduced to the doughty champions who have grappled with and conquered the peculiar abuses we have so long inveighed against in vain. The pork and veal pies, with their bumps of delusive promise, and their little cubes of gristle and bad fat, the scalding infusion satirically called tea, the stale bad buns, with their veneering of furniture polish, the sawdusty sandwiches, so frequently and so energetically condemned, and, more than all, the icy stare from the counter, the insolent ignoring of every customer's existence, which drives the hungry frantic—all these are doomed. The genii are rapidly teaching the public that better things are possible. Hearing to our astonishment that wholesome food, decently served, could now be obtained at certain railway stations,



we inquired into the cause of this unique phenomenon, and became acquainted with the genii.

Before describing our interview, let us recal the last time it was our fortune to be allowed behind the scenes at a railway refreshment-bar. It was in a country town, when we were visiting the broken-down coachman of an esteemed friend. The poor old fellow was more than seventy years of age, rheumatic, and, on his employer finding him past work, interest was made with the railway directors, and the post of purveyor at the station charitably given him. Every one was glad, for "old Robert" was well known and popular; and that he should be now provided for at the cost of the railway company was matter for general rejoicing. None of us ever thought of his fitness for the post, nor of how a man who had so completely outlived his powers as to be unable to fulfil the easy duties he had been accustomed to all his life, would conduct a new business which required special qualifications and trade knowledge. Neither myself nor my fellow-townsmen thought of the railway station as a place at which eating and drinking was a possibility for ourselves, or of the ordinary travellers who passed through Dulby, and lunched or dined at its junction. These had no claim upon our sympathies, whereas the kindly face and venerable figure of old Robert were local institutions; and if by selling muddy beer, fiery sherry, and stale buns to strangers, his last days could be, made easy, who would be churlish enough to cavil at his appointment? The little bar and the comfortable closet attached to it were, after all, neither better nor worse than scores of others on the Great Mudland line. There was no kitchen to speak of, and Robert's pastry was supplied from the little shop round the corner (kept by the head porter's wife), his beer by the local brewer (a director), his wines and spirits by the leading wine-merchant (a large shareholder), and his toffee, barley-sugar, and cigars from the general dealer in the main street, a Quaker, who was "very good" to Robert, and employed him on odd jobs to eke out the slender gains of a railway refreshment-bar.

Every Wednesday and Saturday the remaining stock of the pastry-shop was handed over to Robert, who had it at "stale price." The buns, and puffs, and sponge-cakes not required by the town were thus got rid of to travellers, and good Mrs. Pastry-Cook preserved her well-earned reputation for selling nothing but fresh eatables over her counter. The beer and porter were delivered periodically by the director's men, who were kind and affable to old Robert, and did their best to treat him as if he were a regular customer, instead of a half-dependent on their master. It is a curious circumstance, and one I apprehend to be mainly attributable to this friendship, that if I, or any other resident, chanced to look in for a casual glass of ale, that Robert drew it with his own hands from a distant cask, and disdained to serve us from the ornamental

handles worked for the travellers' benefit. Carefully pouring it out, and holding it between himself and the light with a trembling hand, he would smile knowingly, as if to say, "as good ale as ever left Mr. Cochineal's cellars, and in as good condition as if it were drawn from your own." I never tasted the "property" malt, but it looked muddy, and smelt sour, and I once overheard a big man from the West Riding, who was swathed in mufflers and top-coats, and who had rushed in hurriedly while the train stopped, use highly improper language as he threw his glass down on the counter with much wryness of face and violence of action. The wine-merchant, in his anxiety to do poor Robert a service, sent to London for "a class of wine I don't keep in stock, but which is greatly sold at theatres and places of amusement, where the demand is large and indiscriminating." Toffee and barley-sugar were, for some mysterious reason, the viands most in request at this bar, and ladies and gentlemen who looked quite old would munch a lump of either as a relish to a stale sponge-cake, with an ardour and perseverance surprising at their age. Cigars were contraband; and if Robert or his daughter, yielding to the solicitation of travellers bent upon violating the by-laws, produced a box from a secret corner, it was as a hazardous favour which made criticism impossible.

It was well known that, after all his dealing, the poor old fellow had hard work to keep body and soul together, and that if he had not held his place at an almost nominal rent, and been leniently dealt with by his friendly creditors, he would have been speedily sold up. The custom was all forced, and the ordinary principles of commerce, the buying in the best and cheapest market, and the gaining a connexion by the excellence of the articles sold, were not merely impossible, but would have been laughed at as out of place and absurd, had any theorist suggested them to Robert or his masters. To be sure, the travellers by railway were not the only sufferers from the system. The directors and shareholders lost money by letting eligible premises at a nominal rent; Robert lost custom through the inferiority of his goods and the necessary exorbitance of his charges; and the people he dealt with missed a profitable channel for their several wares through treating their railway customers as serfs bound hand and foot to those with whom they had to deal.

Looking back with the light afforded me by the genii, I see that the system was radically and inherently rotten; that charity to Robert meant cruelty to the public, and that the results were painful to many, and unsatisfactory to all. But, while visiting my old friend's servant, it never occurred to me that there was any connexion between the manner of his appointment and the miserably unsatisfactory condition of railway refreshment-bars generally. So I listened to his request that I would interest myself with the directors—who were looked up to by Robert much as a devout Hindoo might regard Bhudda or Vishnu

—to grant him an extra room, and left him with a very distinct and indigestive remembrance of a lunch of "spice-cake" which was like Derbyshire spar, and of the bare and comfortless aspect of the shabby little place. Since then I have, for my sins, visited refreshment stations of far greater pretensions than poor Robert's; but, with scarcely an exception, they have been as wretchedly meagre as his; and whenever it has been possible to peer below the surface, I have found the task of catering for railway stations, and for their supply of provisions and wine, to be conducted on similarly profitless principles. Sometimes the privilege is used as a director's or shareholder's job; sometimes it is given as a bonus to people otherwise employed; sometimes a brewer's nominee is first tied hand and foot and then put in to sell goods, by which he can only make a profit by weakening or adulterating: the one thing uniform is the shameful treatment of the public, and the natural indignation it has caused.

It was upon this field that the genii came, and saw, and conquered. At present the entire commissariat of more than one line of railway is entrusted to them; and they are also the chosen refreshment contractors of large public establishments, such as the Royal Italian Opera, the Horticultural Gardens, and the City Corn Exchange. Their refreshment-bar at the Paris Exhibition was the most frequented of all; their damsels the most popular; and their table d'hôtel one of the sights of that noisy, feverish place.

It is near Ludgate-hill, and in a small counting-house filled with books and papers, that I present my credentials and become acquainted with the genii, who are courteous men of business, with nothing to distinguish them from other successful mercantile or professional folk. Anything less like the conventional type of refreshment contractor than the quiet, well-mannered people before us, it would be hard to find; and we promptly decide that they are genii, who have assumed the shape of human philanthropists the better to carry out their beneficent aims. We have passed through a large outer office, like a bank, at which well-dressed clerks are busy upon ledgers and "returns;" and are seated in a smaller sanctum, a sort of "manager's parlour," and learn with wonder what railway refreshment contracting really is. "Capital, enterprise, experience," form, the genii assure us, the magic at the root of their success. This success they consider established; and are willing, nay anxious, to extend their operations. The genii are remarkable mortals, and their career and success at the antipodes sound like a chapter out of the Arabian Nights. Such trifles as huge Melbourne cafés, with stained glass domes, polished oak and rosewood floors and palatial fittings, and with billiard and news rooms of the latest type of luxury, seem to have sprung up at their command, and to have speedily recouped their enormous outlay. A refreshment-vestibule of immense area is opened in connexion with the Melbourne Theatre, and

speedily becomes a popular dining-place, independently of its play-going customers. The genii are appointed refreshment contractors to the government railways of the colony of Victoria, and there inaugurate the system we are examining now. They become the caterers for the great Werribee encampment of the volunteers of Victoria, and provide satisfactorily for the eating and drinking of twenty thousand people, building a restaurant four hundred feet long, and in which one thousand people could and did dine simultaneously. They despatch one of their familiars to England with a draft for three thousand pounds, as a preliminary sop; and eleven of the All-England Cricketers are spirited to Australia on handsome terms, the genii clearing a large sum by the admission-charge for seeing those heroes play. Burning like two Alexanders for fresh worlds to conquer, the genii landed in England early in 1863. One of the twain had previously visited here, and contrasting the refreshment system in vogue on our railways with that under his own management in Victoria, at once decided to seize upon the vacant ground. His partner saw with him the vast opportunity for usefulness and advantage which existed in neglected England, and, after some preliminaries, they became refreshment contractors on a metropolitan line. Success was immediate, and has continued to increase from that time until now.

The genii are as warm advocates of "payment by results" as Mr. Lowe himself, and stipulate, before entering upon a contract, that the railway company shall, in every instance, provide the refreshment stations with good cellarage, adequate cooking facilities, and comfortable sleeping apartments. They pay, instead of rent, a per-centage upon their returns, so that the interests of contractors and company are identical. Every station is worked on a uniform plan, and the one we are visiting is the chief office and the heart and brain of the entire system. This system is one of intense centralisation. The eating and drinking at Birmingham or Dover is as closely supervised by the genii and their officers at headquarters as if they sat in a back parlour at each place, and were constantly watching their local customers from behind the blind.

The operations are gigantic, and the elaborate method of book-keeping makes waste and fraud impossible. If any of the pretty girls in this employment—and there are in summer two hundred and fifty of these—allow compliments from idlers, or undue attention to their own personal appearance, to interfere with their usefulness, the fact is known at headquarters before a fortnight has passed. Not by employing spies, nor any other derogatory course, but by a system of check which is so exquisitely minute that wastefulness in drawing beer, or indifference to customers, is proved by the inexorable logic of figures. The genii have twenty-one refreshment stations in full work, eighteen of which are on railways, and give

employment to about eight hundred men and women. The accounts from every station, and from each of the departments which supply the stations, are made up and forwarded to the central cave every day, together with a return of the money taken and the corresponding checks. The familiars of the genii sort and compare these, and abstract their result into magic volumes, which show the profit upon each article sold, down to such trifles as a solitary Abernethy biscuit, one glass of absinthe, or a sausage-roll, as well as the net cost of maintenance at each of the twenty-one stations. The amount received and the quantity sold, the goods supplied and the stock remaining at each bar, are checked against each other—at some bars once a week, at others once a fortnight—by gauging and stock-taking sorcerers in the service of the genii. We are asked to test the system by putting a question as to what has taken place at any distant refreshment-room within the last few days; and, after a pause, demand the number of rice biscuits sold last week at Faversham, together with their cost and profit; and the quantity of macaroons and sandwiches consumed at the Chatham refreshment-bar in the same period. Smiling a little at the easy nature of the task, one of the genii flutters a few pages of accounts knowingly, and we have put before us, in the clearest way, the entire consumption at each of the bars selected, and every item of the stock left last Saturday, down to an eighth of a bottle of liqueur. "Another plan we adopt," continued the genii, "to guard ourselves against fraud and carelessness, and to see that each bar is properly worked, is to watch narrowly the surplussage column in the weekly returns, and occasionally to move the persons in charge. You see, in all our calculations we allow a certain per-centage over, for what is called waste. Our allowance is, moreover, so liberal as to make a sensible addition to the week's returns. Thus, every night, when the cash is taken, there should be a few pence or a few shillings more than the collective amount of the goods sold. Of course, if the young ladies are careless or wasteful, this sum decreases, and there is no better test of management than that the surplussage column should mount up steadily, and bear a fair proportion to the goods sold and money received. You'll see by this abstract that we mark a decrease in surplussage directly it occurs. If this diminution happens only once, we say nothing about it. If for two weeks running there is little or no surplussage, we guess there is something wrong. Not necessarily dishonesty, you understand, but lax management. What do we do? Move the person in charge to another station at which the returns are regular; sending the chief of this to control the bar at which the decreases take place. If we find the bar-returns to change places, the decreasing one to go suddenly up, and the one hitherto regular to fluctuate and fall, we need no further evidence, but are satisfied that the person we have trusted is a bad manager.

Sometimes, moreover, a new eye will detect little faults of detail which have escaped the notice of the person always there, and will make suggestions which it may be important to carry out. There's no magic, I do assure you, either about our mode of management or our success; it's mere routine and figures; but routine and figures properly applied. We claim to have revolutionised the system of railway refreshment, simply because we commenced on a proper principle, and brought experience and capital into the business. We can make terms, where others have to accept them" (I thought of poor Robert, and the tradesmen who were "very good" to him), "and our departments are quite independent of each other, after the plan adopted in the large Manchester warehouses. Their heads, the chief butcher, or cellarman, or pastry-cook, sell their wares to the various bars, and keep as strict a profit-and-loss account on everything they part with, or buy, as if they were dealing with the outside public. They're all anxious, you see, to make the department they're responsible for remunerative for their own credit's sake; and while one desires to secure the largest profit, the other cries out the instant the charge is too high. If the manageress of one of our refreshment-bars, for example, found she was paying our butcher a higher price for meat than she could procure it for elsewhere, she would naturally object to have the profits of her bar reduced; and her complaint would meet with immediate attention, probably from my partner or myself. We're our own wine and cigar importers, bakers, confectioners, pastrycooks, and grocers, and we have, besides, extensive stores of glass, earthenware, and other requirements for our business. Our buns and cakes are sent down fresh every day to all the stations on the line from our bakery at Blackfriars, and those left on hand are sent back every night. Sweets are despatched in the same way from our confectionery factory at Ludgate. Then, again, our people have every facility for cooking and serving well. The stipulation with the secretary of this railway, that we should have sufficient room allotted to us for cellarage and kitchens, has been, I think you'll say when you've been over them, faithfully carried out. We claim to be the first people who made cheap wine popular, and we now give a claret, at a shilling the pint bottle, which is good enough for anybody's drinking. Our meat comes direct from Scotland, and we could show you some figures connected with the cost price of Aberdeen beef, which, I think, would make you admit the recent outcry against butchers' prices has been exaggerated. We have three Italian confectioners constantly employed. Our young ladies are many of them better paid than they would be as governesses or ladies'-maids, from both of which classes we are largely supplied. They are all provided with homes and looked after by us. Our cooking apparatus is of the most recent construction; our men-cooks are skilful and experienced; and" (here the genii lowered his voice

to an emphatic whisper) "whenever we receive a complaint, we investigate it at once, hear both sides, weigh the evidence, and act accordingly. A gentleman writes up to us that his cup of tea was cold, or weak, at Birmingham, where our establishment is independent of the railway; or an old lady complains that her chop was ill served at Herne Bay; and passes are sent down to the people implicated, who come up and explain matters to us here."

Having heard thus much of the theory of this pleasant necromancy, we next see it in practice. Huge and well-stocked cellars, with clerks entering requisitions for wine from the various stations, and cellarmen silently at work; vast underground kitchens, where men in spotless white linen suits are busily engaged, and where the shoots to and from the dinner-rooms up-stairs are never idle; a private butcher's shop, with carcasses of the Aberdeen beef in long rows, and joints of Moor mutton—in themselves a testimony of excellence—are preludes to inspection of gilded chambers in which scores of people are dining—all in comfort, many in luxury. There are, besides the railway bars, first and second-class dining-rooms, and dining-rooms for ladies only. In the first is a silver grilling machine, which, with the elaborately ornamented stove it works on, cost more than a thousand pounds. At a signal from one of the *genii* it is lifted, and I am gratified with a sight of its hall-mark. This is the cave, and there is as much difference between its present appearance, sumptuous, comfortable, and costly, and the dry arch it was before the *genii* exorcised its demons of rubbish and neglect, as between the bill of fare and wine-list, and poor Robert's toffee and "peculiar" sherry. Everything is on a club scale—glass, linen, food, and decorations. Joints, made-dishes, and the game in season are all being served, and it needs the shrill shriek of the whistle and the hoarse rumble of the trains overhead to remind us that we are in a railway station, and that this scene of comfort and magnificence is a mere addition to a traveller's refreshment-bar. The counters are in another department, which we inspect later, to find them luxuriously appointed and profusely stocked. They are crowded with customers, many of whom are evidently not travellers, but who prefer being served by the bright-eyed, cheerfully obliging nymphs here, to patronising taverns or coffee-houses. We are again assured that the smallest and most distant station under the control of the *genii* differs from what we see only in its proportions and in the variety of its viands. Borrowing the bill of fare of the first-class dining-room, which is changed every day, we compare it half an hour later with that of one of the principal clubs in Pall-Mall, and find it superior in some particulars, and equal in all. Under the *genii*, the hungry Briton may count upon nourishing food and wholesome drinks, and recalling the miseries of the past, the insolence of Mugby, and the barrenness which has prevailed from Dan in England to Beersheba

in North Britain, we mentally kiss the magician's hand, and pray that the outlying railway world may be shamed or coerced into imitation.

### A CHRONICLE IN WORSTED.

O THE sun, the blinding, burning sun on these rich green Norman flats! It is a relief and a comfort to quit the road, and creep at last into the narrow Bayeux streets, lime-white and clean, inodorous, and with every upper window a miniature garden. The love of flowers is universal in Norman towns; and the poorer the neighbourhood, the gayer and richer often the hanging garlands on the window-sills. We call to mind one at Caen, a perfect bower of geranium, heliotrope, and fuchsia, high under the eaves of a most ancient and decayed dwelling; a picture in the street, with a bird-cage hanging in the midst, and the bird singing as if in Eden—sunshine, song, and sweetness living and thriving still in the cold shade of utter poverty!

It is these spots of brightness, suggestive of another brightness within, that give their distinctive charm to these old French cities. The busy working world has passed them by. No country town in peaceful England was ever drowsier at midsummer than Bayeux to-day. Yet Bayeux has seen stirring times—war, revolution, civil riot, religious despotism, in all their varieties of misery, triumph, and defeat; and not so long ago but that their visible traces remain, and living traditions of them survive amongst the elder generation.

We asked nobody the way anywhere, but dreamed along at our leisure on the shady side of the streets, turning hither and turning thither where we espied attraction; the whole long day being before us, and we in no haste to have done with our sight-seeing. As we took our slow journey, with a pause here and a pause there, now at the window of an old curiosity-shop, then before a still-life group of splendid luscious fruit in a barrow, three ladies flashed by us—ladies in carmelite costumes and broad straw hats, from across the Channel like ourselves, but burdened with bags, and in virtuous hot haste to accomplish their duty towards Bayeux.

"They are coming from the Tapestry," we say, and set our faces in the direction whence they are returning.

The Tapestry is kept at the city library, but we see no building that bears a frontispiece of publicity. There is a woman standing within a little wicket, darning a stocking, and apparently on the watch for any casualty fortune may be kind enough to send to break the monotony of the day. We will inquire of her, for it is noon now, and the blaze is cruel.

"This is the library," says she, in answer to us, and opens the wicket that we may pass into a court where broken stone coffins and mutilated stone figures, heads, limbs, trunks, are disposed in picturesque confusion, with pots of



brilliant flowers and creeping weeds amongst them. The luxuriant clusters of a grape-vine cover the whole front of the house, which serves as home to the letters, arts, sciences, and antiquities of Bayeux; and chief amongst them all, to that famous chronicle in worsted of the conquest of England by the Normans, which was worked by Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, and by the ladies of her court.

We used to believe that other theory of the production of this tapestry which attributes it to Saxon maidens, professional embroideresses commissioned by Bishop Odo, the Conqueror's brother; but, now we have seen it, good-bye for ever to that notion! It is certainly the work of amateurs; very feeble amateurs at the beginning, and very heedless some of them too, but who improved as they went on, and gathered interest in their self-imposed task. Nevertheless, we can follow for some way the hand of a naughty damsel, who traced the legs of her knights in white cotton, and neglected to fill them up; and we are of opinion that, after a time, some good-natured gentleman, with a better idea of drawing a horse than the ladies, was pressed into their service, and helped them with their designs. The achievement is so old, was done by such noble fingers, records specifically such vast events, that masculine historians speak of it with awful respect; but a lady may be allowed a laugh at its grotesqueries, for surely Matilda and her ladies must have laughed as they wrought at some of them. The black horse standing on its head at the Battle of Hastings, for instance—was a serious countenance inclined over him, from the tip of his nose on which he is balanced, to the tip of his erect tail? Who drew him? That wild witty fellow, Robert Carthose, perhaps, Matilda's favourite son; for to a well-regulated feminine imagination the conception would have been impossible.

And as for the work, it is not beautiful nor exquisite, nor even curious as handicraft. The groups are outlined in white chain-stitch, and each figure is filled in all of one colour, with those fine worsteds which we used to work over balls when we were children, and called *cruels*. The stitch employed is the long *cruelling* stitch, and a lady might easily do a knight and a horse in a day. The word *tapestry* describes the famous relic very inexactly to those who have only seen old English work. Queen Matilda's chronicle is done on a piece of coarse linen cloth, about seventy-five yards long, and half a yard deep, and the linen unadorned is the background. It consists of fifty-eight groups or scenes, the explanation of each being worked in Latin under it, and forming the lower border; the upper border is composed of the shields and crests of the knights and gentlemen who took part in the Conquest. As it is now arranged, even those who run may read it. On the ground floor of the library glass cases have been constructed, in which it is stretched at length on the line of the eye. We began at the beginning, where the cloth is much decayed and roughly mended, but where the first group of the story is as legible as on the

day it was done, and there we read from scene to scene the famous tale of the invasion and conquest of England.

We have read it elsewhere in scores of books, but still it makes an oddly vivid and fresh impression on us in the old worsted chronicle. The figures have no anatomy, the faces no expression, but the action of them is lively and true. There is King Edward sending Harold to Duke William, to tell him he shall one day be king of England. That opens the epic, and it goes on dramatically through Harold's journey and voyage, his shipwreck and capture by the Count of Ponthieu, his deliverance and reception by William at Rouen, to the great scene in the palace at Bayeux, where he swears upon a hidden shrine of relics to recognise and support the Duke of Normandy's right to the English throne. Then follows Edward's death, and Harold's acceptance of the crown, to the great joy of the people; his coronation, and the soothsayers predicting evil days for him, from the sign of a star that has appeared. The news of these events is carried to William, who commands ships to be built, sets sail, and lands at Pevensey. The cooks prepare meat, and William dines, then holds a council at Hastings, and, after various preliminary scenes, harangues his army, and engages Harold. Harold's brothers, Gurth and Leofwin, are slain, his army is cut to pieces, and he falls with arms in his hands. On the field of victory, William returns thanks to God; and there Matilda's worsted chronicle concludes—frayed and worn at the end as at the beginning, but still telling the story of her lord's great conquest completely, and as fairly as any of the chroniclers who have written it with pen and ink.

The library has other treasures—pictures, scientific and archaeological collections; and in the long upper room where the books live, there was one person deep in study, without his coat. The open windows look over the green square; and when we have finished our investigation, thither we take our lazy way, to eat pears and échaudés for our lunch (if ever you go to Bayeux, don't try to lunch on échaudés; they are no better than bubbles). We found a bench in partial shade under the limes, where sat an old gentleman raising a lean hand to feel a breath of air; there was not a breath. But here, as elsewhere, the boys were irrepressible. A busy group, out of school, came upon the Place to fly kites—one a kite of Brobdingnag. Oh, the perseverance, the patience, of those close-cropped lads, coaxing this monster kite to rise! They tried and failed, and tried and failed again; until at last a stray breeze for a vagary caught it up, drifted it twenty yards or so, and then dropped it like a shot. This was too much. The master of the kite wound up his string, and lifting his precious big toy from the ground, walked off with it, disheartened for the day.

Really, Bayeux is a very quiet place. We wonder whether anybody was ever born here—anybody remarkable, that is. Yes, the Chartiers were—Alain the poet, secretary to Charles the

Seventh, Jean, his brother, the chronicler of St. Denis, and Guillaume, bishop of Paris, one of the three commissioners appointed by the Pope to revise the trial and condemnation of Joan of Arc. Anybody else? Admiral Coigny. What did Admiral Coigny do? We don't know. He is a name in the guide-book, and he fills a page in history that we have either forgotten or never read.

As at Caen, so at Bayeux, there are many resident families of the aristocracy—quite a society, indeed, but, for the nonce, a society as invisible as if it were in the moon. All the world has gone to the sea, to Luc, to Lion, to Étretat, to Trouville. The world has shown its sense, we also will go to the sea; let us journey to-morrow by the Délivrande to Luc. So be it—and now to creep back to the railway for Caen.

### SIR JOHN'S TROUBLES.

#### IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

If ever there was a man who ought to have been happy, but if ever there was one who was thoroughly miserable, it was Sir John Milson, K.C.B., retired Major-General of Indian service, resident at 104, St. Andrew-terrace, and member of the Senior United Service and the Oriental Clubs. He had, by thirty-five years' hard professional work in the East, attained not only a comfortable position for the remainder of his days, but had brought with him from India an honourable reputation as a soldier. Sir John had not been born to wealth, and in gaining his present rank and name he had not, like many of his contemporaries, lost either his liver, his temper, or the faculty of enjoying England and English life. Sir John was a type of a class and a profession whose virtues are but too little recognised amongst us. He was the son of a country clergyman, who obtained a cadetship for him in the East India Company's service when he was little more than sixteen years of age. This happened in the good old days when our Eastern Empire was governed by a Court of Directors in Leadenhall-street, and when the voyage to India was performed in the large frigate-like ships that constituted the trading fleet of the honourable corporation which ruled over a kingdom as big as Europe.

When John Milson reached Calcutta he was attached to a native infantry regiment at Barrackpore, was promoted in due time to be ensign in a native corps "up the country," and after having passed through three years of pale ale drinking, snipe shooting, and hog hunting, turned to in earnest to study the languages, and having passed the requisite examination, was appointed interpreter and quartermaster of his regiment. In India, officers take a pride in being soldiers. The Indian army, in this respect, more resembled, before the days of amalgamation, the French than the British service. No man is more respected in Bengal, Bombay, or Madras, than the officer who knows his duty thoroughly, and takes credit to him-

self for the way that duty is done. John Milson was one of this kind. He was proud of his regiment, proud of being able to drill the battalion—the quartermaster in the Indian army is an officer on the regular roster of the corps, and, being mounted on parade, acts as a second major at drill—proud of his knowledge of the languages, proud of the confidence his men had in him. Before he was five-and-twenty he had been through a campaign, and mentioned in general orders; a year later he was appointed second in command of an irregular corps, which, at thirty, he commanded, although only a captain in his own regiment and a brevet major in the army. About this time, being on leave at the Presidency, he was captured by the bright eyes and good figure of Annie Stevens, a young lady who had just landed at Calcutta to join her father, who was a Colonel and a Deputy-Commissary-General. Miss Stevens, although she had been hardly a month in India, had already refused two highly eligible offers. Old Mr. Currise, the Sudder Judge, had paid her great attention, and she—knowing him to be some years older than her father, and being great friends with his three grown-up daughters, who were all older than herself—accepted his presents, and took drives in his carriage, just as she might have done those of an uncle or a grandfather. But when this yellow old widower suddenly went down on his knees one fine morning and asked Annie to become the second Mrs. Currise, she first thought him in joke, then laughed at him, and ended by declining the honour intended her. "Society" in Calcutta thought that Currise had been very badly treated, and took care to let Annie see that they had a very poor opinion of any young lady who would refuse so eligible a person as a Sudder Judge drawing four thousand rupees a month, with a chance of a Seat in Council on the first vacancy. "Why did you not accept him?" remonstrated old Mrs. General Fancome, who, when Currise had been rejected, had volunteered to act as his mediator with Annie. "Mr. Currise has a brother on the Direction, the Adjutant-General is his first cousin, and he is distantly related to the President of the Board of Control. Only think what you might do for your family if you accepted him. But Annie pleaded, "He is so very old."

"Not a bit, my dear. He only came out to India in '14, and allowing him to have been twenty years of age, that would only make him a little more than sixty."

"But," said Annie, "I am not eighteen yet;" and was deaf to the voice of the charmer. In vain did her father, the Deputy-Commissary-General, and her mother urge her. She was determined not to lead "society" in Calcutta at such a sacrifice; and so she declined the offer of the Sudder Judge's hand a second time—for an offer it really was which old Mrs. Fancome had urged upon her.

In like manner had she received and declined the offer of hand and heart made her by a great military magnate, no less a person than Colonel Fatnix, the Commissary-General himself, a

man who was not more than five years older than her father, and who had never been married, was known to be immensely rich, and to have the best cook and the best cellar in British India. Colonel Fathix was not more than fifty-nine, or perhaps sixty, when he proposed to Annie, and having for many years been looked upon as quite a gay young bachelor, retained still that brevet rank in "society." His friends always thought that Fathix would leave India, when his time for retiring from the service came round, without a wife, and consequently were both astonished and annoyed when they perceived he was paying his addresses to "that strapping fine girl, sir," as they called Annie Stevens. In India people live fast, and courtships are invariably short as well as decisive. The fact of Colonel Fathix being at the head of the Department in which Annie's father held a post, was enough of itself to make people certain that his suit would be accepted. And it would have been a good thing in the monetary way for the Deputy-Commissary-General, if Annie could have seen matters through a pair of Indian spectacles. However, she did not, and rejected when it was offered the hand of her ancient military admirer, as she had that of her civil adorer, the old Sudder Judge.

After having "jawaubed"—an Anglo-Indian term, which means, answered, or refused—two such very eligible persons in one month, Annie Stevens had not what the Americans call "a good time" of it with her parents. Father and mother looked upon her as a child who might have forwarded their interests in life very greatly, but who had, upon two separate occasions, deliberately thrown away as many excellent chances. Her father, the Deputy-Commissary, felt this very severely, and in more ways than one. He was a poor man, and needed a much better appointment than the one he held, in order to pay what he owed, put by a little money, retire in due time from the service, and go home. With either a Sudder Judge or a Commissary-General—rather let us say the Commissary-General, for there is but one in each Indian Presidency—as son-in-law, he would have been certain of advancement in the service, and would, in all probability, have attained his object in a very few years. Not only, however, had that hope vanished, but his chief, Colonel Fathix, looked very black at him, hardly spoke when they met, and even in their official communications was now as laconic and disagreeable as possible. The fact was, the old boy had given out when the Sudder Judge was "jawaubed" by Miss Stevens, that he, the aforesaid Fathix, could "go in and win" what the civilian had not been able to secure. So sure was this gay dog of winning his bride, that he made sundry bets at the Bengal Club and elsewhere—"three to one in gold mohrs," and six to two in dozens of "Simpkin"—backing himself to win the fair Annie, and make her his bride

within a certain number of months. He had lost his bets, and was not by any means improved in temper thereby, the more so as sundry old fellows of his own standing in the service used to joke him about wearing the willow, and similar old-fashioned jests.

Annie's parents believed that, however fine a girl—and that she was as fine a young woman as ever landed on the Hooghly there can be no doubt—their daughter was, she would now never be able to marry. "I only ask you," said the poor old lady, Mrs. Stevens, when she poured out her griefs to some of her familiar friends—"I only ask you how it is possible that any man would propose for a girl who has thrown over a Sudder Judge and a Commissary-General. I am sure she will live and die an old maid."

But this prophecy, like many others, was destined to prove false. Within a month after she refused the Commissary-General, Annie met at a Government House ball John Milson, who was then the Commandant of an irregular regiment, a major by brevet, and a Companion of the Bath. Milson had come down to the presidency on leave of absence. His reputation as a soldier was already pretty well known, and as a not slight additional recommendation, he was a man of more than average good looks, with that deference for the weaker sex which always makes its way with women, and a total absence from that self-sufficient puppyism, which of all other things they hate the most. The first day he saw Annie he admired her very much; the second he liked her more than he admired her; the third he was desperately in love. A fortnight later—for, as I said before, in India people live fast—he proposed to her in the verandah of old Currise's house; for, by the advice of his counsellor, old Mrs. Fancome, that infatuated Judge had given an immense ball to the whole "society" of Calcutta, in the hopes that Annie might, by seeing the magnificence of his establishment, repent her of the "jawaub," and consent to become the second Mrs. Currise. Amongst other guests Major Milson had been asked, and having previously ascertained that Annie was to be there, he went to the ball determined to know his fate. The host had to be attentive to so many great people of "society" during the evening, that he had little time to devote to Miss Stevens. However, he managed after supper—the old fellow could not dance, and this alone, as they say on the turf, "weighted" him very heavily in the race for a wife—to get a few minutes' conversation with her, and ended a somewhat nervous harangue by asking her to become his wife. Annie was a frank, open-hearted girl, and although she was really grateful and pitied the old Judge, could not resist the pleasure of a joke. She curtsied very low to him in reply, and said that she had barely half an hour before accepted the hand of another gentleman.

"And pray may I ask," said the astonished Currise, "who the fortunate individual is?" and was not a little surprised when she named Major Milson. "Milson, Milson?" he kept repeating,

\* A "gold mohr" means sixteen rupees, or thirty-two shillings. "Simpkin" is the Anglo-Indian for champagne.

"Milson! Why, that is a young fellow who commands the Second Irregulars; he has not fifteen hundred rupees a month, and owes at least fifty thousand."

Miss Stevens replied that she was not au fait with the major's monetary affairs, but that she had accepted him for her future lord and master, and on this the conversation ended, not, however, without the old lover—who at heart was really a good fellow—offering her his congratulations, and saying he felt sure she would be happy with her future husband.

Not so, however, Annie's father, the Deputy-Commissary-General. It is true that nothing could be urged against Major Milson's character; but there was no concealing the fact of his being very much in debt. His pay and allowances amounted to about fifteen hundred rupees, or one hundred and fifty pounds per month, which makes about eighteen hundred per annum English money. Now, as Indian officers are obliged by deductions made from their pay, and by grants from government for the same purpose, to make ample allowance for their widows and family, this income would have been quite enough to marry upon, if Major Milson had only been free from debt, which he certainly was not. And, in India, being in debt invariably means that the debtor is under deductions to pay off his debt, either to one of the banks, or to some agent or merchant who may be his sole creditor. Milson made no secret of his difficulties; in fact, in India there are no secrets about anything, for every one knows his neighbour's affairs quite as well as he does himself—we all inhabit glass houses in that country. To these debts, reducing as they did the major's income to something like four hundred rupees a month, the Deputy-Commissary-General made a very serious objection; they formed an insurmountable obstacle between the major and his daughter. However, when a young lady has made up her mind to a thing, there is very little use thwarting her, for in the end she is certain to have her own way. Annie Stevens heard all that had to be said against her lover, and determined to accept him with all his monetary imperfections upon his head. She said she was determined to marry him, and then to get him out of debt, and she accomplished both designs. Of the wedding and the grand doings which it caused in Calcutta we need not write, for is it not inscribed in the proper columns of *The Englishman* and of the *Bengal Hurkuru* of the day? After their marriage, Major and Mrs. Milson went "up country," and, owing to the influence of the latter upon her husband, and also to a promise which he had made her before they married, he sold off his race-horses, dismissed his English jockey, parted with his "shikaree" elephant,\* put all his rifles, guns, racing saddles, four-in-hand harness, and such-like unnecessary luxuries up to auction,

retaining merely one charger for himself, and a bullock yharrie, or spring covered cart drawn by bullocks, in which his wife could go about to pay visits, or travel when they were marching, or go to church. He wanted very much to purchase a carriage and pair for her use, but she would not allow him to do so, saying that their first duty was to get clear of debt, and their second to lay up money against a rainy day, when sickness or other causes might oblige him to go home on leave.

And she carried her point. Until he married, Milson had always found that as fast as he paid off with one hand he borrowed with the other. Of his fifteen hundred rupees a month he paid off regularly eleven hundred to his creditors, and yet his debts seemed never to decrease. But his wife proved herself a capital woman of business. She took his affairs in hand, reduced their household expenses to something less than half what they were when Milson was a single man, commencing her reign by turning off old Hassein Allie, the faithful Kitmagar, or butler, who had robbed his master for the last fifteen years with a perseverance worthy of a better cause. So well did Annie succeed in her financial operations, that in two years after their marriage a sensible diminution was made in the amount Milson owed, in four years he was nearly clear, in five he was a free man, and in six they had commenced that nest-egg which afterwards increased so largely. In the mean time Milson had been promoted from brevet to "pucka" major, from that to lieutenant-colonel, and had been offered, and had accepted, an appointment in the Political Department, which gave him three thousand rupees a month, or about three thousand six hundred pounds sterling per annum. His expenses were, as a matter of course, somewhat increased, but still Annie kept a very tight hand on the purse-strings. They had no family, and thus were saved a hundred necessary outlays which are imperative upon those who are obliged to live in India, and have to send their children home to be educated. Milson never came home for his furlough, for he looked forward to making up what would enable him to spend a certain income in England, and only wanted to return to Europe when he gave up the service altogether. In due time he obtained the rank of major-general, and with it an appointment which obliged him to reside at the Presidency, being nothing else but that of Commissary-General, out of which Annie's old admirer, Colonel Fathix—long ago gathered to his fathers, and buried in the churchyard of his native parish in Hertfordshire—had made so much money. In this position Major-General Milson began to roll up money in earnest—somehow or other Commissariat officers in India always do. Annie—no longer a very young woman, for they had been married by this time more than twenty years—still looked after the purse, which now contained something very comfortable in bank shares, East Indian railway scrip, and other substantial securities, besides

\* A "shikaree elephant" is an elephant trained and accustomed to being used in tiger-shooting, deer-shooting, and in other sports where the sportsman fires off his back at the game.

\* "Pucka," an Anglo-Indian term for *bonâ fide*, or real.



a highly respectable balance at the "Agra and United Service Bank, Calcutta Branch." When the mutiny broke out, Milson did the state excellent service, so much so, that at the strong recommendation of the Secretary of State for India, he was made a K.C.B., and was thenceforward known to the world, as he will be to the readers of this little tale, as Major-General Sir John Milson, K.C.B.; Annie, as a matter of course, becoming Lady Milson, and much honoured as the wife of a well-known gallant officer. Milson then left the service in which he had done so much good work, and came home to England. His pension, together with what in the Indian service used to be called his "off-reckonings"—equivalent to the pay as full colonel of a regiment which is given to general officers in the English army—amounted to fifteen hundred a year, and the interest of what he had saved, his money being well invested in Indian securities, gave him about three thousand per annum additional. He was at the time of the opening of this story in excellent health, and, being but little more than fifty years of age, was able to enjoy himself as keenly in England as if he had never been out of the country; and, indeed, far more than the majority of languid youths whom he met at the club and at every dinner or evening party to which he went. In field-sports few men could beat Milson. He was as good a shot, as straight a rider across country, and could handle the ribbons of a four-in-hand drag quite as well at five-and-fifty as he could at five-and-twenty. He had introductions to the best houses, was well received everywhere, and was much liked wherever he went. He took a keen interest in all political and social movements, had been asked to contest a Midland borough in Parliament, and had more than half made up his mind to do so at the next election. In London he belonged to two good clubs, and go where he would he always met people who in Bengal, or in some Indian campaign, had known him and received some kindness or other from his hands. He had been a very popular man in India, and was now quite as much liked in England. His health was good, his digestion excellent, his household well arranged, and the balance at his banker's more than he required. With all these many advantages was it possible Sir John Milson could be unhappy? He was about as miserable a man as is to be found within the limits of the kingdom. What his troubles were, how they arose, who caused them, and how they were cured, must be told in another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

ONE of the oldest—if not *the* oldest, and certainly the most intimate—friend whom Sir John Milson had in the world was Colonel Laber, of the Bengal Horse Artillery. The two soldiers had gone out to India together some thirty years before, and their respective careers had been very similar. As cadets, Milson had gone out for the infantry, and Laber for the artillery, and had in due time joined their respective

corps. For many years they had been stationed at the same place, and in hog-hunting, tiger-shooting, horse-racing, and the other occupations which form the staple amusements of young Indian military men, they had mixed a great deal together, their pursuits being in these respects very similar. As years passed on, both had sobered down considerably, more particularly Milson, who, as we have seen, had, when a brevet-major, married and settled in life. Laber remained a bachelor, but this had not impaired the intimacy between the two friends, and whenever they met, or whenever they were at the same station, no two officers saw more of each other. In the race for promotion, the infantry officer had often headed the artilleryman, and vice versa. Laber was a regimental captain some years before Milson, but the latter had got to be major before his friend, who had again reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel first. After this Milson had again come up with his friend, and had reached the rank of major-general, and had been able to retire upon his pension, his old friend having then attained the rank of full colonel, and being in command of a brigade of horse artillery. Since his return to England, Sir John Milson had often written to ask Colonel Laber why he did not retire from the service, as he was now entitled to his pension, and, never having married, had no cause or reason to save money, as his friend had done. But the reply was always the same: "My pension," wrote Laber, "will die with me; and as I have others depending upon me, I must save something for their sake before I give up the service." The colonel never mentioned what persons were dependent upon him, and as Sir John knew he had never married, he made sure that there was behind the scenes some widowed sister, or impoverished brother, or nephew, or nieces, for whom his old friend thought it incumbent upon him to put by for the future. In these brief paragraphs about himself, Colonel Laber offered no explanations, and therefore Sir John made no further inquiries. He thought that there must be a skeleton more or less unsightly in his old friend's cupboard, and that it was not for him to ask to see that which the other was evidently so unwilling to show. A certain amount of correspondence—an uncommonly frequent one, considering the great distance apart and the now entirely different occupations of the two friends—was kept up after the return of Sir John Milson to Europe, and presents were, so to speak, exchanged from time to time between the two veterans.

"I have been over to Delhi," Colonel Laber would write, "and saw there some very beautiful scarfs of quite a new design and fabric. I have sent one down to Calcutta for transmission by the next mail to Lady Milson, and I hope she will accept it from her old friend."

He had a great respect for Annie had the colonel, and whenever she asked him why he did not marry, would always answer that he was waiting until he could find a lady exactly like her; and, indeed, the saying had become quite

a joke between the two friends, not the less relished because it was somewhat old.

"I am looking everywhere for the counterpart of Annie," Sir John used to write after he got home, "but have not yet succeeded in finding her; when I do, she shall be packed up and sent out overland to your address. But, in order to console you in your bachelorhood, I have sent by Southampton a newly invented breech-loading rifle, which the Bishop of Bondstreet has just brought out, and which, unless the hand and eye of the man who killed the tiger just twenty-four years ago this month at the Jussulpore ghaut have lost their cunning, ought to do much execution, after the cold weather is over, in the Terrai jungles. The present is from Annie, who sends her love, and hopes still that your next Christmas dinner will be eaten in this house, and that you will give up what really seems to be your intention, of dying in harness. Seriously speaking, or rather seriously writing, do, my dear Laber, come home before you get too old to enjoy life in England. You are now entitled to your pension, which, with off-reckonings, will give you one thousand two hundred pounds a year. You must have saved a few thousand rupees, quite enough to purchase and furnish a box somewhere in the country, where you can rent good shooting. In the season you can come up to London, and I need hardly say that if you would eat seven dinners a week in our house, it would please us more than if you ate six, and that for the six we shall be more thankful than for five. I will get your name put up for the Senior and the Oriental, at both of which places you will meet a host of old friends. You will be quite well enough off not to deny yourself a park cob in the season, and a month at Homburg or Vichy when that is over. Surely such a life is in every way preferable to soldiering at your age, particularly when you have no special object—so far as I can see—for saving money. You must be tired of India. The country has entirely changed since we soldiered together at Cabul, and since the days of the mutiny a curse seems to have descended upon the service. What pleasure can you have in field-days, in blowing up young subalterns for not being more regular at the riding-school, or in sitting as a magistrate in the orderly-room, and in awarding punish drill to drunken gunners? Be advised, old friend, and come home; send in your papers on receipt of this letter, and write me to welcome you at Marseilles, at Malta, or even at Alexandria. Annie says she would like nothing better than a trip to the latter place, and that we will both be delighted to meet you there, go all together by the French steamer to Jaffa, visit Jerusalem, thence by Damascus into Syria, spend a couple of months on the Lebanon, and come home by Constantinople and the Danube. Say the word, be up and doing, and you will find us as good as our word."

In due time, some seventy days or so, there came a reply to this letter, but not such a one as Sir John hoped for, and, in the most important particular, by no means what he had ex-

pected, as the following extract—comprising the chief part of the letter—will show:

"I only wish, my dear Milson, that I could follow your advice, leave the service, and go home at once. But, as you will see before you finish this letter, I cannot do so until I have scraped together a few more of those rupees which we all despise so much whilst we are young, but find so absolutely necessary when we get older. And this leads me at once to the pith of my tale, which for many years I have wished to tell you, but somehow, when the moment came, never dared to speak of until now I am obliged to do so. You have often joked me about having a skeleton in my closet, and I have as often denied the imputation; but I did not speak the truth. I have a skeleton in my closet, and, what is more, I am about to send it home ere long to be placed in your keeping, whilst I remain out there to work some years longer for what will make it independent when I am gone. My large pay and allowances out here, and the very economical way I live (for I don't spend more than the junior second lieutenant in the regiment), has enabled me to insure my life very heavily, so that if I die before I leave the service, my heir will be able to claim ten thousand pounds. In the mean time, I am rolling up my savings in the best and safest investments, and, so soon as I can write myself down as worth that amount in hard cash, I will consider my labour for others at an end, and betake myself to the ease and dignity of a retired Anglo-Indian in an arm-chair at the Oriental Club.

"But, before I go further, my dear Milson, in this my confession, I do exact a promise from you, which I am quite sure you will give, for the sake of old days when we both went out as griffins together, and in remembrance of a friendship and an intimacy which has now spread over a great part of half a century. The promise I want you to make is this—that you will not reveal to a soul—not even to your wife—what I now tell you, and that you will keep the secret religiously until, if ever, I release you from observing it. I shall take no further steps in the matter until I hear from you in reply to this letter; and when I do hear, as I expect, promising secrecy and accepting the trust, I will at once carry out my intentions.

"You will be surprised to hear that I have two daughters, of nineteen and eighteen years respectively. Their mother was what in this country we call a Portuguese, which, as you know, means a half-caste descendant of the old conquerors of India. I met her, and was married to her according to the rites of the Roman Church, when I was on leave at Goa, about twenty-five years ago. Unfortunately, the marriage, owing to some want of formality about the papers I ought to have submitted, was not legal according to the Portuguese law; had it been so, it would have been also legal in England, and my daughters would have been entitled to the usual allowance from the military fund at my death. Very soon after our marriage I was sent, as you may remember, to Barmah, where I had a political appointment. My wife followed me there in due time, and, as I was the only English officer at the station, the fact of my wife being dark was not observed. I never mentioned the fact of my marriage to you, for, like all Anglo-Indians, I felt somewhat ashamed at my wife being a half-caste. I always intended to tell you of it some day, and, had we ever been at the same station together during my wife's lifetime, I should of course have made a clean breast of it. She lived seven years after our marriage, and, curiously enough, these were exactly the seven years in which you and I

saw so little of each other. I was three years and a half in Burmah; then I was ordered, on temporary duty, with a battery, to Afghanistan, and, as you remember, although in the same army, we were in different divisions, and did not see very much of each other. During that time my wife remained at Burmah, where I joined her at the end of the campaign. A year later she had her first child and a year afterwards her last, which she died in giving birth to. Our marriage was a very happy one under the circumstances, but I question whether it would have been so had I been stationed at any place where there were other ladies, and where my poor wife's deficiencies of education and manners would have been brought into contrast with them. After her lights—after the fashion of her people, her education, and her manners—she made me an excellent wife, and I don't think we ever had a disagreeable word. It was only at her death, when I wanted to put my two babies upon the register of the military fund, I discovered that, although married to her in the eyes of God and by a clergyman of her own church, I was not legally married according to the laws of Portugal, and therefore was not so according to those of England. I took the best legal opinion in England, and every lawyer confirmed this view of the case. A marriage of any English subject is considered as lawful as if the Archbishop of Canterbury had performed it, provided it is lawful in the country where it is solemnised, but not so otherwise; and, to my intense sorrow, I discovered that my two daughters were illegitimate when it was too late to rectify the error.

"A bachelor home in the hot plains of Hindostan was no place for young children, and I therefore determined to consign my two girls to the care of the French nuns, who have a convent in the Himalaya Hills. I did so, and for many years only saw them now and again when I could run up to pay them a short visit and snatch a mouthful of cool air for myself. My wife had on her death-bed made me promise that they should be brought up in her own faith, and this I promised solemnly should be the case. The lady superior of the convent never knew that the children were mine, nor do the girls themselves know it. When I took them to the convent, I said they were the orphans of a friend of mine who had died in very bad circumstances, and that, not being likely to marry myself, I had adopted his little ones. I gave them the name of Faber, and to this day they go by the name of Ann and Mary Faber. They are two lovely girls—not the least like me, but the very image of what their poor mother was when we married, only not so dark. They look more like Italians or Spaniards, and, unless they alter very much indeed, will grow up very handsome women.

"And now, my dear old friend, you know what my skeleton is, or, rather, you know that I have two of them; and you can understand why I have remained out in India so long. Not being legitimate, my two girls would be destitute when I die, unless I can manage to save up something to leave them, and I have fixed the minimum of that 'something' at five thousand pounds each. If I am spared four years longer, I shall be able, what between the money I have saved and the amount I can spare from my pension towards paying for a life insurance, to leave them this amount at my death. But not until they are much older, and are able to understand the difficulties I was placed in with regard to their poor mother, will I ever tell them, or tell any one else, that they are my daughters. You are the only person on earth that knows my secret, and I rely upon your

honour not to mention it, even to Lady Milson, although, of all other women on earth, she is the one for whom I have the greatest esteem. If you will do this, and take charge of the two girls when they reach home, you will add a very large item to the already long list of kind acts for which I am in your debt. Only remember these girls must not be known to any single being as my daughters. Their name is Faber. They believe that their father was an English merchant in Burmah, that both their parents are dead, and that I have adopted them.

"What I want you to do for them is as follows: Immediately after I receive your reply—and I will gladly pay for a telegram as far as Suez, so as to anticipate the mail—I will prepare the girls for their start, and send them to Calcutta, there to embark for England. But, in any case, it will be some three or four months after you receive this before they can reach Southampton. In that time I want you to look out for some respectable lady with whom they can be boarded, and who will take charge of their education, and provide the requisite masters for them at my expense. In short, I should wish you to engage a suitable person for them as governess, and to take a small house somewhere in the western suburbs of London for her and the girls, where they can have all the advantages of good masters. I will send you, by the same mail that takes the girls home, five hundred pounds; this will serve to outfit them, on their arrival, with clothes, &c., and to furnish the house you take for them neatly. After that, I will remit home four hundred or five hundred pounds per annum, out of which the salary of the governess, the rent of the house, the girls' clothing, and all other expenses ought to be paid. If you don't think it enough, let me know, and I will send more. I need hardly remind you that you should be very particular in the person you select as governess. The girls can read and write English well, and have a fair knowledge of history, but they are utterly ignorant of all that the world calls accomplishments, and have no more idea of music or drawing than your old Kitmagar, who, by the way, comes regularly once a month to ask news about 'Milson Sahib' and the 'Mem Sahib.'

"And now I shall bring this letter to an end. I have made my confession to you, told you how you can help me, and shall await your answer with some impatience, although I am pretty certain that it will be in the affirmative. There is merely one thing I find I have omitted to say, which is, that as, according to the promise I made their mother, the girls have been brought up as Roman Catholics, it would be better if you procured the services of a governess belonging to that church."

This lengthy communication of his old friend, Sir John Milson found lying on his breakfast-table one morning about Easter. According to his wont, he had got down-stairs a few minutes before his wife. The Calcutta mail had been delivered that morning, and there were four or five Indian letters (as well as "The Englishman Overland Summary"), and one or two for his wife, for both had many friends who remembered them in the land of the sun. Colonel Laber's handwriting at once caught Sir John's eyes, but he generally left it to the last, preferring to scan the communications from others before reading the long, pleasant, gossiping epistle of his old comrade, which recalled many bygone events—deeds in the battle as well as the hunting field; night attacks on

the Khyber Pass; outlying pickets at Cabool; jolly mess-dinners; race-meetings; tigers shot, missed, bagged, and lost; shooting-parties living in tents; and all the other thousand incidents of a soldier's life in India. "Here is a long letter from the old gunner"—the name by which Colonel Laber had been known for the last thirty years—said Sir John to his wife, as he opened it between the intervals of eating his egg and tasting his tea. "What can the old boy have to say?" Presently, as he began to read it, his attention got more and more riveted, and Annie had to ask him twice for rice (like all Anglo-Indians, the Milsons always had rice on their breakfast-table) before she could draw his attention to the every-day business of breakfast. When he looked up, his face wore such an appearance of astonishment that Lady Milson was almost alarmed. "Why, John, what is the matter? Has anything happened to Laber?" she asked, and this recalled to his memory what he had just gathered from the letter, that all regarding the story of his old friend's marriage, to say nothing of the advent of the two young ladies, was to be kept a profound secret from his wife, from whom Sir John had never before in his life concealed anything. He mumbled out some tale about bank shares having fallen in value, and that he must look after the interests of his old friend. Lady Milson did not ask to see the letter, for she had letters of her own to read, and was not a woman in whose character curiosity was a leading feature. Sir John said something about having letters to write, and an appointment at the club, as an excuse for hurrying over his breakfast, and made off to the back dining-room (called his study), there to think over the difficulties which his old chum was about to impose upon him.

"Why on earth I am not to tell Annie anything about the story is more than I can understand," said Sir John to himself, as soon as he was alone. He read the letter over again from beginning to end, every now and then uttering some expletive of bewilderment. "Married, and never told me a word about it. A French governess; furnished house; two girls—very beautiful. What on earth will people say or think when they hear I am the paymaster of a suburban residence inhabited by three ladies? If I could only tell Annie, and ask her advice! I must ask some person's advice. I can't order a French governess as I would a pair of boots or a hamper of wine. No, hang me, I can't do it. I'll write and tell the gunner that I really must decline, unless he allows me to tell Annie all about it."

Such was the determination—which lasted rather less than three minutes—at which Sir John arrived. But then came the thought, would not his old friend have done as much for him, had he been in the same situation and their positions reversed? Who was it that years ago lent

him three thousand rupees to pay his racing bets, which he would have been utterly and for ever disgraced if he had not met at once? Who was it, when he heard Lieutenant Milson was laid up with jungle fever, rode a hundred miles in ten hours through a blazing hot Indian sun, and nursed his friend until he was on his legs again? How did he escape the sword of that Afghan fanatic, near Candahar? Was it not by Laber shooting the man dead as he rushed upon his friend, who was looking away at the time? How many years ago was that—thirty? no, something short of that—about twenty-six or seven. What jolly days were those Afghan campaigning times! Where were all the fellows who dined at the Horse Artillery mess the night before Guznee was taken? We sat down sixteen. By Jove! I remember all their names much better than I do those of the stupid stuck-up people I met last week at Lord Eggspeen's. They are all gone now, except Laber, myself, and Spinivith, the little doctor, who has retired and lives at Cheltenham. I will do it. Laber would do as much, and more, for me if I wanted him. I must pull through the business somehow. I dare say there are agencies and places where French governesses can be procured. It will be a nuisance keeping the affair a secret from Annie, but I must do it, if I want to serve Laber. The mail goes out to-night. I'll write and say that I'll do all he wants, and I'll telegraph at the same time to Suez, so that he will know my determination by the mail that leaves there to-morrow for Bombay, and the message will be sent on at once from that place to Meerut. Do it? Of course, I must and will. If there was no difficulty to overcome, nothing unpleasant in doing what the old gunner asks me, there could be no merit on my part. Of course I'll do it."

And so Sir John betook himself to the Oriental Club, and wrote by that night's mail to tell his old friend that the girls might be sent home, and he would do his utmost to do all their father wanted, and to have a suitable house ready for them on their arrival in England.

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### THE OVERTURE.

DAY of the month and year, November the thirtieth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-five. London Time by the great clock of Saint Paul's, ten at night. All the lesser London churches strain their metallic throats. Some, flippantly begin before the heavy bell of the great cathedral; some, tardily begin three, four, half a dozen, strokes behind it; all are in sufficiently near accord, to leave a resonance in the air, as if the winged father who devours his children, had made a scunding sweep with his gigantic scythe in flying over the city.

What is this clock lower than most of the rest, and nearer to the ear, that lags so far behind to-night as to strike into the vibration alone? This is the clock of the Hospital for Foundling Children. Time was, when the Foundlings were received without question in a cradle at the gate. Time is, when inquiries are made respecting them, and they are taken as by favour from the mothers who relinquish all natural knowledge of them and claim to them for evermore.

The moon is at the full, and the night is fair with light clouds. The day has been otherwise than fair, for slush and mud, thickened with the droppings of heavy fog, lie black in the streets. The veiled lady who flutters up and down near the postern-gate of the Hospital for Foundling Children has need to be well shod to-night.

She flutters to and fro, avoiding the stand of hackney-coaches, and often pausing in the shadow of the western end of the great quadrangle wall, with her face turned towards the gate. As above her there is the purity of the moonlit sky, and below her there are the defilements of the pavement, so may she, haply, be divided in her mind between two vistas of reflection or experience? As her footprints crossing and recrossing one

another have made a labyrinth in the mire, so may her track in life have involved itself in an intricate and unravellable tangle?

The postern-gate of the Hospital for Foundling Children opens, and a young woman comes out. The lady stands aside, observes closely, sees that the gate is quietly closed again from within, and follows the young woman.

Two or three streets have been traversed in silence before she, following close behind the object of her attention, stretches out her hand and touches her. Then the young woman stops and looks round, startled.

"You touched me last night, and, when I turned my head, you would not speak. Why do you follow me like a silent ghost?"

"It was not," returned the lady, in a low voice, "that I would not speak, but that I could not when I tried."

"What do you want of me? I have never done you any harm?"

"Never."

"Do I know you?"

"No."

"Then what can you want of me?"

"Here are two guineas in this paper. Take my poor little present, and I will tell you."

Into the young woman's face, which is honest and comely, comes a flush as she replies: "There is neither grown person nor child in all the large establishment that I belong to, who hasn't a good word for Sally. I am Sally. Could I be so well thought of, if I was to be bought?"

"I do not mean to buy you; I mean only to reward you very slightly."

Sally firmly, but not ungently, closes and puts back the offering hand. "If there is anything I can do for you, ma'am, that I will not do for its own sake, you are much mistaken in me if you think that I will do it for money. What is it you want?"

"You are one of the nurses or attendants at the Hospital, I saw you leave to-night and last night."

"Yes, I am. I am Sally."

"There is a pleasant patience in your face which makes me believe that very young children would take readily to you."

"God bless 'em! So they do."

The lady lifts her veil, and shows a face no older than the nurse's. A face far more refined and capable than hers, but wild and worn with sorrow.

"I am the miserable mother of a baby lately received under your care. I have a prayer to make to you."

Instinctively respecting the confidence which has drawn aside the veil, Sally—whose ways are all ways of simplicity and spontaneity—replaces it, and begins to cry.

"You will listen to my prayer?" the lady urges. "You will not be deaf to the agonised entreaty of such a broken suppliant as I am?"

"O dear, dear, dear!" cries Sally. "What shall I say, or can I say! Don't talk of prayers. Prayers are to be put up to the Good Father of All, and not to nurses and such. And there! I am only to hold my place for half a year longer, till another young woman can be trained up to it. I am going to be married. I shouldn't have been out last night, and I shouldn't have been out to-night, but that my Dick (he is the young man I am going to be married to) lies ill, and I help his mother and sister to watch him. Don't take on so, don't take on so!"

"O good Sally, dear Sally," moans the lady, catching at her dress entreatingly. "As you are hopeful and I am hopeless; as a fair way in life is before you, which can never, never, be before me; as you can aspire to become a respected wife, and as you can aspire to become a proud mother; as you are a living loving woman, and must die; for God's sake hear my distracted petition!"

"Deary, deary, deary ME!" cries Sally, her desperation culminating in the pronoun, "what am I ever to do? And there! See how you turn my own words back upon me. I tell you I am going to be married, on purpose to make it clearer to you that I am going to leave, and therefore couldn't help you if I would, Poor Thing, and you make it seem to my own self as if I was cruel in going to be married and not helping you. It ain't kind. Now, is it kind, Poor Thing?"

"Sally! Hear me, my dear. My entreaty is for no help in the future. It applies to what is past. It is only to be told in two words."

"There! This is worse and worse," cries Sally, "supposing that I understand what two words you mean."

"You do understand. What are the names they have given my poor baby? I ask no more than that. I have read of the customs of the place. He has been christened in the chapel, and registered by some surname in the book. He was received last Monday evening. What have they called him?"

Down upon her knees in the foul mud of the by-way into which they have strayed—an empty street without a thoroughfare, giving on the dark gardens of the Hospital—the lady would drop in her passionate entreaty, but that Sally prevents her.

"Don't! Don't! You make me feel as if I was setting myself up to be good. Let me look in your pretty face again. Put your two hands in mine. Now, promise. You will never ask me anything more than the two words?"

"Never! Never!"

"You will never put them to a bad use, if I say them?"

"Never! Never!"

"Walter Wilding."

The lady lays her face upon the nurse's breast, draws her close in her embrace with both arms, murmurs a blessing and the words, "Kiss him for me!" and is gone.

Day of the month and year, the first Sunday in October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-seven. London Time by the great clock of Saint Paul's, half-past one in the afternoon. The clock of the Hospital for Foundling Children is well up with the Cathedral to-day. Service in the chapel is over, and the Foundling children are at dinner.

There are numerous lookers-on at the dinner, as the custom is. There are two or three governors, whole families from the congregation, smaller groups of both sexes, individual stragglers of various degrees. The bright autumnal sun strikes freshly into the wards; and the heavy-framed windows through which it shines, and the panelled walls on which it strikes, are such windows and such walls as pervade Hogarth's pictures. The girls' refectory (including that of the younger children) is the principal attraction. Neat attendants silently glide about the orderly and silent tables; the lookers-on move or stop as the fancy takes them; comments in whispers on face such a number from such a window are not unfrequent; many of the faces are of a character to fix attention. Some of the visitors from the outside public are accustomed visitors. They have established a speaking acquaintance with the occupants of particular seats at the tables, and halt at those points to bend down and say a word or two. It is no disparagement to their kindness that those points are generally points where personal attractions are. The monotony of the long spacious rooms and the double lines of faces, is agreeably relieved by these incidents, although so slight.

A veiled lady, who has no companion, goes among the company. It would seem that curiosity and opportunity have never brought her there before. She has the air of being a little troubled by the sight, and, as she goes the length of the tables, it is with a hesitating step and an uneasy manner. At length she comes to the refectory of the boys. They are so much

less popular than the girls that it is bare of visitors when she looks in at the doorway.

But just within the doorway, chances to stand, inspecting, an elderly female attendant: some order of matron or housekeeper. To whom the lady addresses natural questions: As, how many boys? At what age are they usually put out in life? Do they often take a fancy to the sea? So, lower and lower in tone until the lady puts the question: "Which is Walter Wilding?"

Attendant's head shaken. Against the rules. "You know which is Walter Wilding?"

So keenly does the attendant feel the closeness with which the lady's eyes examine her face, that she keeps her own eyes fast upon the floor, lest by wandering in the right direction they should betray her.

"I know which is Walter Wilding, but it is not my place, ma'am, to tell names to visitors."

"But you can show me without telling me."

The lady's hand moves quietly to the attendant's hand. Pause and silence.

"I am going to pass round the tables," says the lady's interlocutor, without seeming to address her. "Follow me with your eyes. The boy that I stop at and speak to, will not matter to you. But the boy that I touch, will be Walter Wilding. Say nothing more to me, and move a little away."

Quickly acting on the hint, the lady passes on into the room, and looks about her. After a few moments, the attendant, in a staid official way, walks down outside the line of tables commencing on her left hand. She goes the whole length of the line, turns, and comes back on the inside. Very slightly glancing in the lady's direction, she stops, bends forward, and speaks. The boy whom she addresses, lifts his head and replies. Good humouredly and easily, as she listens to what he says, she lays her hand upon the shoulder of the next boy on his right. That the action may be well noted, she keeps her hand on the shoulder while speaking in return, and pats it twice or thrice before moving away. She completes her tour of the tables, touching no one else, and passes out by a door at the opposite end of the long room.

Dinner is done, and the lady, too, walks down outside the line of tables commencing on her left hand, goes the whole length of the line, turns, and comes back on the inside. Other people have strolled in, fortunately for her, and stand sprinkled about. She lifts her veil, and, stopping at the touched boy, asks how old he is?

"I am twelve, ma'am," he answers, with his bright eyes fixed on hers.

"Are you well and happy?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"May you take these sweetmeats from my hand?"

"If you please to give them to me."

In stooping low for the purpose, the lady touches the boy's face with her forehead and with her hair. Then, lowering her veil again, she passes on, and passes out without looking back.

## ACT I.

### THE CURTAIN RISES.

In a court-yard in the City of London, which was No Thoroughfare either for vehicles or foot-passengers; a court-yard diverging from a steep, a slippery, and a winding street connecting Tower-street with the Middlesex shore of the Thames; stood the place of business of Wilding and Co. Wine Merchants. Probably, as a jocosse acknowledgment of the obstructive character of this main approach, the point nearest to its base at which one could take the river (if so inodorously minded) bore the appellation Break-Neck-Stairs. The court-yard itself had likewise been descriptively entitled in old time, Cripple Corner.

Years before the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, people had left off taking boat at Break-Neck-Stairs, and watermen had ceased to ply there. The slimy little causeway had dropped into the river by a slow process of suicide, and two or three stumps of piles and a rusty iron mooring-ring were all that remained of the departed Break-Neck glories. Sometimes, indeed, a laden coal barge would bump itself into the place, and certain laborious heavers, seemingly mud-engendered, would arise, deliver the cargo in the neighbourhood, shove off, and vanish; but at most times the only commerce of Break-Neck-Stairs arose out of the conveyance of casks and bottles, both full and empty, both to and from the cellars of Wilding and Co. Wine Merchants. Even that commerce was but occasional, and through three-fourths of its rising tides the dirty indecorous drab of a river would come solitarily oozing and lapping at the rusty ring, as if it had heard of the Doge and the Adriatic, and wanted to be married to the great conservator of its filthiness, the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor.

Some two hundred and fifty yards on the right, up the opposite hill (approaching it from the low ground of Break-Neck-Stairs) was Cripple Corner. There was a pump in Cripple Corner, there was a tree in Cripple Corner. All Cripple Corner belonged to Wilding and Co. Wine Merchants. Their cellars burrowed under it, their mansion towered over it. It really had been a mansion in the days when merchants inhabited the City, and had a ceremonious shelter to the doorway without visible support, like the sounding-board over an old pulpit. It had also a number of long narrow strips of window, so disposed in its grave brick front as to render it symmetrically ugly. It had also on its roof, a cupola with a bell in it.

"When a man at five-and-twenty can put his hat on, and can say 'this hat covers the owner of this property and of the business which is transacted on this property,' I consider, Mr. Bintrey, that, without being boastful, he may be allowed to be deeply thankful. I don't know how it may appear to you, but so it appears to me."

Thus Mr. Walter Wilding to his man of law, in his own counting-house; taking his hat down from its peg to suit the action to the word, and

hanging it up again when he had done so, not to overstep the modesty of nature.

An innocent, open-speaking, unused-looking man, Mr. Walter Wilding, with a remarkably pink and white complexion, and a figure much too bulky for so young a man, though of a good stature. With crispy curling brown hair, and amiable bright blue eyes. An extremely communicative man: a man with whom loquacity was the irrestrainable outpouring of contentment and gratitude. Mr. Bintrey, on the other hand, a cautious man with twinkling beads of eyes in a large overhanging bald head, who inwardly but intensely enjoyed the comicality of openness of speech, or hand, or heart.

"Yes," said Mr. Bintrey. "Yes. Ha, ha!"

A decanter, two wine-glasses, and a plate of biscuits, stood on the desk.

"You like this forty-five year old port wine?" said Mr. Wilding.

"Like it?" repeated Mr. Bintrey. "Rather, sir!"

"It's from the best corner of our best forty-five year old bin," said Mr. Wilding.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Bintrey. "It's most excellent."

He laughed again, as he held up his glass and ogled it, at the highly ludicrous idea of giving away such wine.

"And now," said Wilding, with a childish enjoyment in the discussion of affairs, "I think we have got everything straight, Mr. Bintrey."

"Everything straight," said Bintrey.

"A partner secured——"

"Partner secured," said Bintrey.

"A housekeeper advertised for——"

"Housekeeper advertised for," said Bintrey, "apply personally at Cripple Corner, Great Tower-street, from ten to twelve—to-morrow, by-the-by."

"My late dear mother's affairs wound up——"

"Wound up," said Bintrey.

"And all charges paid."

"And all charges paid," said Bintrey, with a chuckle: probably occasioned by the droll circumstance that they had been paid without a haggle.

"The mention of my late dear mother," Mr. Wilding continued, his eyes filling with tears and his pocket-handkerchief drying them, "unmans me still, Mr. Bintrey. You know how I loved her; you (her lawyer) know how she loved me. The utmost love of mother and child was cherished between us, and we never experienced one moment's division or unhappiness from the time when she took me under her care. Thirteen years in all! Thirteen years under my late dear mother's care, Mr. Bintrey, and eight of them her confidentially acknowledged son! You know the story, Mr. Bintrey, who but you, sir!" Mr. Wilding sobbed and dried his eyes, without attempt at concealment, during these remarks.

Mr. Bintrey enjoyed his comical port, and said, after rolling it in his mouth: "I know the story."

"My late dear mother, Mr. Bintrey," pursued the wine-merchant, "had been deeply deceived, and had cruelly suffered. But on that subject my late dear mother's lips were for ever sealed. By whom deceived, or under what circumstances, Heaven only knows. My late dear mother never betrayed her betrayer."

"She had made up her mind," said Mr. Bintrey, again turning his wine on his palate, "and she could hold her peace." An amused twinkle in his eyes pretty plainly added—"A devilish deal better than *you* ever will!"

"Honour," said Mr. Wilding, sobbing as he quoted from the Commandments, "'thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land.' When I was in the Foundling, Mr. Bintrey, I was at such a loss how to do it, that I apprehended my days would be short in the land. But I afterwards came to honour my mother deeply, profoundly. And I honour and revere her memory. For seven happy years, Mr. Bintrey," pursued Wilding, still with the same innocent catching in his breath, and the same unabashed tears, "did my excellent mother article me to my predecessors in this business, Pebbleston Nephew. Her affectionate forethought likewise apprenticed me to the Vintners' Company, and made me in time a Free Vintner, and—and—everything else that the best of mothers could desire. When I came of age, she bestowed her inherited share in this business upon me; it was her money that afterwards bought out Pebbleston Nephew, and painted in Wilding and Co.; it was she who left me everything she possessed, but the mourning ring you wear. And yet, Mr. Bintrey," with a fresh burst of honest affection, "she is no more. It is little over half a year since she came into the Corner to read on that door-post with her own eyes, WILDING AND CO. WINE MERCHANTS. And yet she is no more!"

"Sad. But the common lot, Mr. Wilding," observed Bintrey. "At some time or other we must all be no more." He placed the forty-five year old port wine in the universal condition, with a relishing sigh.

"So now, Mr. Bintrey," pursued Wilding, putting away his pocket-handkerchief, and smoothing his eyelids with his fingers, "now that I can no longer show my love and honour for the dear parent to whom my heart was mysteriously turned by Nature when she first spoke to me, a strange lady, I sitting at our Sunday dinner-table in the Foundling, I can at least show that I am not ashamed of having been a Foundling, and that I, who never knew a father of my own, wish to be a father to all in my employment. Therefore," continued Wilding, becoming enthusiastic in his loquacity, "therefore, I want a thoroughly good housekeeper to undertake this dwelling-house of Wilding and Co. Wine Merchants, Cripple Corner, so that I may restore in it some of the old relations betwixt employer and employed! So that I may live in it on the spot where my money is made! So that I may daily sit at the head of the table at which the people in my employment eat together, and may



eat of the same roast and boiled, and drink of the same beer! So that the people in my employment may lodge under the same roof with me! So that we may one and all—I beg your pardon, Mr. Bintrey, but that old singing in my head has suddenly come on, and I shall feel obliged if you will lead me to the pump.”

Alarmed by the excessive pinkness of his client, Mr. Bintrey lost not a moment in leading him forth into the court-yard. It was easily done, for the counting-house in which they talked together opened on to it, at one side of the dwelling-house. There, the attorney pumped with a will, obedient to a sign from the client, and the client laved his head and face with both hands, and took a hearty drink. After these remedies, he declared himself much better.

“Don’t let your good feelings excite you,” said Bintrey, as they returned to the counting-house, and Mr. Wilding dried himself on a jacket behind an inner door.

“No, no. I won’t,” he returned, looking out of the towel. “I won’t. I have not been confused, have I?”

“Not at all. Perfectly clear.”

“Where did I leave off, Mr. Bintrey?”

“Well, you left off—but I wouldn’t excite myself, if I was you, by taking it up again just yet.”

“I’ll take care. I’ll take care. The singing in my head came on at where, Mr. Bintrey?”

“At roast, and boiled, and beer,” answered the lawyer, prompting—“lodging under the same roof—and one and all—”

“Ah! And one and all singing in the head together—”

“Do you know I really *would not* let my good feelings excite me, if I was you,” hinted the lawyer again, anxiously. “Try some more pump.”

“No occasion, no occasion. All right, Mr. Bintrey. And one and all forming a kind of family! You see, Mr. Bintrey, I was not used in my childhood to that sort of individual existence which most individuals have led, more or less, in their childhood. After that time I became absorbed in my late dear mother. Having lost her, I find that I am more fit for being one of a body than one by myself one. To be that, and at the same time to do my duty to those dependent on me, and attach them to me, has a patriarchal and pleasant air about it. I don’t know how it may appear to you, Mr. Bintrey, but so it appears to me.”

“It is not I who am all-important in the case, but you,” returned Bintrey. “Consequently, how it may appear to me, is of very small importance.”

“It appears to me,” said Mr. Wilding, in a glow, “hopeful, useful, de-lightful!”

“Do you know,” hinted the lawyer again, “I really would not ex—”

“I am not going to. Then there’s Handel.”

“There’s who?” asked Bintrey.

“Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Kent, Purcell, Doctor Arne, Greene, Mendelssohn. I know

the choruses to those anthems by heart. Founding Chapel Collection. Why shouldn’t we learn them together!”

“Who learn them together?” asked the lawyer, rather shortly.

“Employer and employed.”

“Aye, aye!” returned Bintrey, mollified; as if he had half expected the answer to be, Lawyer and client. “That’s another thing.”

“Not another thing, Mr. Bintrey! The same thing. A part of the bond among us. We will form a Choir in some quiet church near the Corner here, and, having sung together of a Sunday with a relish, we will come home and take an early dinner together with a relish. The object that I have at heart now, is to get this system well in action without delay, so that my new partner may find it founded when he enters on his partnership.”

“All good be with it!” exclaimed Bintrey, rising. “May it prosper! Is Joey Ladle to take a share in Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Kent, Purcell, Doctor Arne, Greene, and Mendelssohn?”

“I hope so.”

“I wish them all well out of it,” returned Bintrey, with much heartiness. “Good-bye, sir.”

They shook hands and parted. Then (first knocking with his knuckles for leave) entered to Mr. Wilding, from a door of communication between his private counting-house and that in which his clerks sat, the Head Cellarman of the cellars of Wilding and Co. Wine Merchants, and erst Head Cellarman of the cellars of Pebbleson Nephew. The Joey Ladle in question. A slow and ponderous man, of the drayman order of human architecture, dressed in a corrugated suit and bibbed apron, apparently a composite of door-mat and rhinoceros-hide.

“Respecting this same boarding and lodging, Young Master Wilding,” said he.

“Yes, Joey?”

“Speaking for myself, Young Master Wilding—and I never did speak and I never do speak for no one else—I don’t want no boarding nor yet no lodging. But if you wish to board me and to lodge me, take me. I can peck as well as most men. Where I peck, ain’t so high a object with me as What I peck. Nor even so high a object with me as How Much I peck. Is all to live in the house, Young Master Wilding? The two other cellar-men, the three porters, the two ‘prentices, and the odd men?”

“Yes. I hope we shall all be an united family, Joey.”

“Ah!” said Joey. “I hope they may be.”

“They? Rather say we, Joey.”

Joey Ladle shook his head. “Don’t look to me to make we on it, Young Master Wilding, not at my time of life and under the circumstances which has formed my disposition. I have said to Pebbleson Nephew many a time, when they have said to me, ‘Put a livelier face upon it, Joey’—I have said to them, ‘Gentlemen, it is all very well for you that has been accustomed to take your wine into your systems

by the convivial channel of your throattles, to put a lively face upon it; but,' I says, 'I have been accustomed to take *my* wine in at the pores of the skin, and, took that way, it acts different. It acts depressing. It's one thing, gentlemen,' I says to Pebbleson Nephew, 'to charge your glasses in a dining-room with a Hip Hurrah and a Jolly Companions Every One, and it's another thing to be charged yourself, through the pores, in a low dark cellar and a mouldy atmosphere. It makes all the difference betwixt bubbles and vapours,' I tells Pebbleson Nephew. And so it do. I've been a cellarman my life through, with my mind fully given to the business. What's the consequence? I'm as muddled a man as lives—you won't find a muddler man than me—nor yet you won't find my equal in molloncolly. Sing of Filling the bumper fair, Every drop you sprinkle, O'er the brow of care, Smooths away a wrinkle? Yes. Praps so. But try filling yourself through the pores, underground, when you don't want to it!"

"I am sorry to hear this, Joey. I had even thought that you might join a singing-class in the house."

"Me, sir? No, no, Young Master Wilding, you won't catch Joey Ladle muddling the Armony. A pecking-machine, sir, is all that I am capable of proving myself, out of my cellars; but that you're welcome to, if you think it's worth your while to keep such a thing on your premises."

"I do, Joey."

"Say no more, sir. The Business's word is my law. And you're a going to take Young Master George Vendale partner into the old Business?"

"I am, Joey."

"More changes, you see! But don't change the name of the Firm again. Don't do it, Young Master Wilding. It was bad luck enough to make it Yourself and Co. Better by far have left it Pebbleson Nephew that good luck always stuck to. You should never change luck when it's good, sir."

"At all events, I have no intention of changing the name of the House again, Joey."

"Glad to hear it, and wish you good day, Young Master Wilding. But you had better by half," muttered Joey Ladle, inaudibly, as he closed the door and shook his head, "have let the name alone from the first. You had better by half have followed the luck instead of crossing it."

#### ENTER THE HOUSEKEEPER.

The wine-merchant sat in his dining-room next morning, to receive the personal applicants for the vacant post in his establishment. It was an old-fashioned wainscoted room; the panels ornamented with festoons of flowers carved in wood; with an oaken floor, a well-worn Turkey carpet, and dark mahogany furniture, all of which had seen service and polish under Pebbleson Nephew. The great sideboard had assisted at many business-dinners given by Pebbleson Nephew to their connexion, on the

principle of throwing sprats overboard to catch whales; and Pebbleson Nephew's comprehensive three-sided plate-warmer, made to fit the whole front of the large fireplace, kept watch beneath it over a sarcophagus-shaped cellaret that had in its time held many a dozen of Pebbleson Nephew's wine. But the little rubicund old bachelor with a pigtail, whose portrait was over the sideboard (and who could easily be identified as decidedly Pebbleson and decidedly not Nephew), had retired into another sarcophagus, and the plate-warmer had grown as cold as he. So, the golden and black griffins that supported the candelabra, with black balls in their mouths at the end of gilded chains, looked as if in their old age they had lost all heart for playing at ball, and were dolefully exhibiting their chains in the Missionary line of inquiry, whether they had not earned emancipation by this time, and were not griffins and brothers?

Such a Columbus of a morning was the summer morning, that it discovered Cripple Corner. The light and warmth pierced in at the open windows, and irradiated the picture of a lady hanging over the chimney-piece, the only other decoration of the walls.

"My mother at five-and-twenty," said Mr. Wilding to himself, as his eyes enthusiastically followed the light to the portrait's face, "I hang up here, in order that visitors may admire my mother in the bloom of her youth and beauty. My mother at fifty I hang in the seclusion of my own chamber, as a remembrance sacred to me. Oh! It's you, Jarvis!"

These latter words he addressed to a clerk who had tapped at the door, and now looked in.

"Yes, sir. I merely wished to mention that it's gone ten, sir, and that there are several females in the Counting-House."

"Dear me!" said the wine-merchant, deepening in the pink of his complexion and whitening in the white, "are there several? So many as several? I had better begin before there are more. I'll see them one by one, Jarvis, in the order of their arrival."

Hastily entrenching himself in his easy-chair at the table behind a great inkstand, having first placed a chair on the other side of the table opposite his own seat, Mr. Wilding entered on his task with considerable trepidation.

He ran the gauntlet that must be run on any such occasion. There were the usual species of profoundly unsympathetic women, and the usual species of much too sympathetic women. There were buccaneering widows who came to seize him, and who griped umbrellas under their arms, as if each umbrella were he, and each griper had got him. There were towering maiden ladies who had seen better days, and who came armed with clerical testimonials to their theology, as if he were Saint Peter with his keys. There were gentle maiden ladies who came to marry him. There were professional housekeepers, like non-commissioned officers, who put him through his domestic exercise, instead of submitting themselves to catechism. There were languid invalids to whom salary was

not so much an object as the comforts of a private hospital. There were sensitive creatures who burst into tears on being addressed, and had to be restored with glasses of cold water. There were some respondents who came two together, a highly promising one and a wholly unpromising one: of whom the promising one answered all questions charmingly, until it would at last appear that she was not a candidate at all, but only the friend of the unpromising one, who had glowered in absolute silence and apparent injury.

At last, when the good wine-merchant's simple heart was failing him, there entered an applicant quite different from all the rest. A woman, perhaps fifty, but looking younger, with a face remarkable for placid cheerfulness, and a manner no less remarkable for its quiet expression of equability of temper. Nothing in her dress could have been changed to her advantage. Nothing in the noiseless self-possession of her manner could have been changed to her advantage. Nothing could have been in better unison with both, than her voice when she answered the question: "What name shall I have the pleasure of noting down?" with the words, "My name is Sarah Goldstraw. Mrs. Goldstraw. My husband has been dead many years, and we had no family."

Half a dozen questions had scarcely extracted as much to the purpose from any one else. The voice dwelt so agreeably on Mr. Wilding's ear as he made his note, that he was rather long about it. When he looked up again, Mrs. Goldstraw's glance had naturally gone round the room, and now returned to him from the chimney-piece. Its expression was one of frank readiness to be questioned, and to answer straight.

"You will excuse my asking you a few questions?" said the modest wine-merchant.

"Oh, surely, sir. Or I should have no business here."

"Have you filled the station of housekeeper before?"

"Only once. I have lived with the same widow lady for twelve years. Ever since I lost my husband. She was an invalid, and is lately dead: which is the occasion of my now wearing black."

"I do not doubt that she has left you the best credentials?" said Mr. Wilding.

"I hope I may say, the very best. I thought it would save trouble, sir, if I wrote down the name and address of her representatives, and brought it with me." Laying a card on the table.

"You singularly remind me, Mrs. Goldstraw," said Wilding, taking the card beside him, "of a manner and tone of voice that I was once acquainted with. Not of an individual—I feel sure of that, though I cannot recall what it is I have in my mind—but of a general bearing. I ought to add, it was a kind and pleasant one."

She smiled, as she rejoined: "At least, I am very glad of that, sir."

"Yes," said the wine-merchant, thoughtfully

repeating his last phrase, with a momentary glance at his future housekeeper, "it was a kind and pleasant one. But that is the most I can make of it. Memory is sometimes like a half-forgotten dream. I don't know how it may appear to you, Mrs. Goldstraw, but so it appears to me."

Probably it appeared to Mrs. Goldstraw in a similar light, for she quietly assented to the proposition. Mr. Wilding then offered to put himself at once in communication with the gentlemen named upon the card: a firm of proctors in Doctors' Commons. To this, Mrs. Goldstraw thankfully assented. Doctors' Commons not being far off, Mr. Wilding suggested the feasibility of Mrs. Goldstraw's looking in again, say in three hours' time. Mrs. Goldstraw readily undertook to do so. In fine, the result of Mr. Wilding's inquiries being eminently satisfactory, Mrs. Goldstraw was that afternoon engaged (on her own perfectly fair terms) to come to-morrow and set up her rest as housekeeper in Cripple Corner.

#### THE HOUSEKEEPER SPEAKS.

On the next day Mrs. Goldstraw arrived, to enter on her domestic duties.

Having settled herself in her own room, without troubling the servants, and without wasting time, the new housekeeper announced herself as waiting to be favoured with any instructions which her master might wish to give her. The wine-merchant received Mrs. Goldstraw in the dining-room, in which he had seen her on the previous day; and, the usual preliminary civilities having passed on either side, the two sat down to take counsel together on the affairs of the house.

"About the meals, sir?" said Mrs. Goldstraw. "Have I a large, or a small, number to provide for?"

"If I can carry out a certain old-fashioned plan of mine," replied Mr. Wilding, "you will have a large number to provide for. I am a lonely single man, Mrs. Goldstraw; and I hope to live with all the persons in my employment as if they were members of my family. Until that time comes, you will only have me, and the new partner whom I expect immediately, to provide for. What my partner's habits may be, I cannot yet say. But I may describe myself as a man of regular hours, with an invariable appetite that you may depend upon to an ounce."

"About breakfast, sir?" asked Mrs. Goldstraw. "Is there anything particular—?"

She hesitated, and left the sentence unfinished. Her eyes turned slowly away from her master, and looked towards the chimney-piece. If she had been a less excellent and experienced housekeeper, Mr. Wilding might have fancied that her attention was beginning to wander at the very outset of the interview.

"Eight o'clock is my breakfast-hour," he resumed. "It is one of my virtues to be never tired of broiled bacon, and it is one of my vices to be habitually suspicious of the freshness of eggs." Mrs. Goldstraw looked back at him,

still a little divided between her master's chimney-piece and her master. "I take tea," Mr. Wilding went on; "and I am perhaps rather nervous and fidgety about drinking it, within a certain time after it is made. If my tea stands too long——"

He hesitated, on his side, and left the sentence unfinished. If he had not been engaged in discussing a subject of such paramount interest to himself as his breakfast, Mrs. Goldstraw might have fancied that *his* attention was beginning to wander at the very outset of the interview.

"If your tea stands too long, sir——?" said the housekeeper, politely taking up her master's lost thread.

"If my tea stands too long," repeated the wine-merchant, mechanically, his mind getting further and further away from his breakfast, and his eyes fixing themselves more and more inquiringly on his housekeeper's face. "If my tea—— Dear, dear me, Mrs. Goldstraw! what is the manner and tone of voice that you remind me of? It strikes me even more strongly to-day, than it did when I saw you yesterday. What can it be?"

"What can it be?" repeated Mrs. Goldstraw.

She said the words, evidently thinking while she spoke them of something else. The wine-merchant, still looking at her inquiringly, observed that her eyes wandered towards the chimney-piece once more. They fixed on the portrait of his mother, which hung there, and looked at it with that slight contraction of the brow which accompanies a scarcely conscious effort of memory. Mr. Wilding remarked:

"My late dear mother, when she was five-and-twenty."

Mrs. Goldstraw thanked him with a movement of the head for being at the pains to explain the picture, and said, with a cleared brow, that it was the portrait of a very beautiful lady.

Mr. Wilding, falling back into his former perplexity, tried once more to recover that lost recollection, associated so closely, and yet so undiscoverably, with his new housekeeper's voice and manner.

"Excuse my asking you a question which has nothing to do with me or my breakfast," he said. "May I inquire if you have ever occupied any other situation than the situation of housekeeper?"

"Oh yes, sir. I began life as one of the nurses at the Foundling."

"Why, that's it!" cried the wine-merchant, pushing back his chair. "By Heaven! Their manner is the manner you remind me of!"

In an astonished look at him, Mrs. Goldstraw changed colour, checked herself, turned her eyes upon the ground, and sat still and silent.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Wilding.

"Do I understand that you were in the Foundling, sir?"

"Certainly. I am not ashamed to own it."

"Under the name you now bear?"

"Under the name of Walter Wilding."

"And the lady——?" Mrs. Goldstraw

stopped short, with a look at the portrait which was now unmistakably a look of alarm.

"You mean my mother," interrupted Mr. Wilding.

"Your——mother," repeated the housekeeper, a little constrainedly, "removed you from the Foundling? At what age, sir?"

"At between eleven and twelve years old. It's quite a romantic adventure, Mrs. Goldstraw."

He told the story of the lady having spoken to him, while he sat at dinner with the other boys in the Foundling, and of all that had followed, in his innocently communicative way. "My poor mother could never have discovered me," he added, "if she had not met with one of the matrons who pitied her. The matron consented to touch the boy whose name was 'Walter Wilding' as she went round the dinner-tables—and so my mother discovered me again, after having parted from me as an infant at the Foundling doors."

At those words Mrs. Goldstraw's hand, resting on the table, dropped helplessly into her lap. She sat, looking at her new master, with a face that had turned deadly pale, and with eyes that expressed an unutterable dismay.

"What does this mean?" asked the wine-merchant. "Stop!" he cried. "Is there something else in the past time which I ought to associate with you? I remember my mother telling me of another person at the Foundling, to whose kindness she owed a debt of gratitude. When she first parted with me, as an infant, one of the nurses informed her of the name that had been given to me in the institution. You were that nurse?"

"God forgive me, sir—I was that nurse!"

"God forgive you?"

"We had better get back, sir (if I may make so bold as to say so), to my duties in the house," said Mrs. Goldstraw. "Your breakfast-hour is eight. Do you lunch, or dine, in the middle of the day?"

The excessive pinkness which Mr. Bintrey had noticed in his client's face began to appear there once more. Mr. Wilding put his hand to his head, and mastered some momentary confusion in that quarter, before he spoke again.

"Mrs. Goldstraw," he said, "you are concealing something from me!"

The housekeeper obstinately repeated, "Please to favour me, sir, by saying whether you lunch, or dine, in the middle of the day?"

"I don't know what I do in the middle of the day. I can't enter into my household affairs, Mrs. Goldstraw, till I know why you regret an act of kindness to my mother, which she always spoke of gratefully to the end of her life. You are not doing me a service by your silence. You are agitating me, you are alarming me, you are bringing on the singing in my head."

His hand went up to his head again, and the pink in his face deepened by a shade or two.

"It's hard, sir, on just entering your service," said the housekeeper, "to say what may cost me the loss of your good will. Please to remember, and how it may, that I only speak



because you have insisted on my speaking, and because I see that I am alarming you by my silence. When I told the poor lady, whose portrait you have got there, the name by which her infant was christened in the Foundling, I allowed myself to forget my duty, and dreadful consequences, I am afraid, have followed from it. I'll tell you the truth, as plainly as I can. A few months from the time when I had informed the lady of her baby's name, there came to our institution in the country another lady (a stranger), whose object was to adopt one of our children. She brought the needful permission with her, and after looking at a great many of the children, without being able to make up her mind, she took a sudden fancy to one of the babies—a boy—under my care. Try, pray try, to compose yourself, sir! It's no use disguising it any longer. The child the stranger took away was the child of that lady whose portrait hangs there!"

Mr. Wilding started to his feet. "Impossible!" he cried out, vehemently. "What are you talking about? What absurd story are you telling me now? There's her portrait! Haven't I told you so already? The portrait of my mother!"

"When that unhappy lady removed you from the Foundling, in after years," said Mrs. Goldstraw, gently, "she was the victim, and you were the victim, sir, of a dreadful mistake."

He dropped back into his chair. "The room goes round with me," he said. "My head! my head!" The housekeeper rose in alarm, and opened the windows. Before she could get to the door to call for help, a sudden burst of tears relieved the oppression which had at first almost appeared to threaten his life. He signed entreatingly to Mrs. Goldstraw not to leave him. She waited until the paroxysm of weeping had worn itself out. He raised his head as he recovered himself, and looked at her with the angry unreasoning suspicion of a weak man.

"Mistake?" he said, wildly repeating her last word. "How do I know you are not mistaken yourself?"

"There is no hope that I am mistaken, sir. I will tell you why, when you are better fit to hear it."

"Now! now!"

The tone in which he spoke warned Mrs. Goldstraw that it would be cruel kindness to let him comfort himself a moment longer with the vain hope that she might be wrong. A few words more would end it—and those few words she determined to speak.

"I have told you," she said, "that the child of the lady whose portrait hangs there, was adopted in its infancy, and taken away by a stranger. I am as certain of what I say as that I am now sitting here, obliged to distress you, sir, sorely against my will. Please to carry your mind on, now, to about three months after that time. I was then at the Foundling, in London, waiting to take some children to our institution in the country. There was a question that day about naming an infant—a boy—who had just been received. We generally named them out of the

Directory. On this occasion, one of the gentlemen who managed the Hospital happened to be looking over the Register. He noticed that the name of the baby who had been adopted ('Walter Wilding') was scratched out—for the reason, of course, that the child had been removed for good from our care. 'Here's a name to let,' he said. 'Give it to the new foundling who has been received to-day.' The name was given, and the child was christened. You, sir, were that child."

The wine-merchant's head dropped on his breast. "I was that child!" he said to himself, trying helplessly to fix the idea in his mind. "I was that child!"

"Not very long after you had been received into the Institution, sir," pursued Mrs. Goldstraw, "I left my situation there, to be married. If you will remember that, and if you can give your mind to it, you will see for yourself how the mistake happened. Between eleven and twelve years passed before the lady, whom you have believed to be your mother, returned to the Foundling, to find her son, and to remove him to her own home. The lady only knew that her infant had been called 'Walter Wilding.' The matron who took pity on her, could but point out the only 'Walter Wilding' known in the Institution. I, who might have set the matter right, was far away from the Foundling and all that belonged to it. There was nothing—there was really nothing that could prevent this terrible mistake from taking place. I feel for you—I do indeed, sir! You must think—and with reason—that it was in an evil hour that I came here (innocently enough, I'm sure), to apply for your housekeeper's place. I feel as if I was to blame—I feel as if I ought to have had more self-command. If I had only been able to keep my face from showing you, what that portrait and what your own words put into my mind—you need never, to your dying day, have known what you know now."

Mr. Wilding looked up suddenly. The inbred honesty of the man rose in protest against the housekeeper's last words. His mind seemed to steady itself, for the moment, under the shock that had fallen on it.

"Do you mean to say that you would have concealed this from me if you could?" he exclaimed.

"I hope I should always tell the truth, sir, if I was asked," said Mrs. Goldstraw. "And I know it is better for me that I should not have a secret of this sort weighing on my mind. But is it better for you? What use can it serve now——?"

"What use? Why, good Lord! if your story is true——"

"Should I have told it, sir, as I am now situated, if it had not been true?"

"I beg your pardon," said the wine-merchant. "You must make allowance for me. This dreadful discovery is something I can't realise even yet. We loved each other so dearly—I felt so fondly that I was her son. She died, Mrs. Goldstraw, in my arms—she died blessing me as only a mother *could* have

blessed me. And now, after all these years, to be told she was *not* my mother! O me, O me! I don't know what I am saying!" he cried, as the impulse of self-control under which he had spoken a moment since, flickered, and died out. "It was not this dreadful grief—it was something else that I had it in my mind to speak of. Yes, yes. You surprised me—you wounded me just now. You talked as if you would have hidden this from me, if you could. Don't talk in that way again. It would have been a crime to have hidden it. You mean well, I know. I don't want to distress you—you are a kind-hearted woman. But you don't remember what my position is. She left me all that I possess, in the firm persuasion that I was her son. I am not her son. I have taken the place, I have innocently got the inheritance of another man. He must be found! How do I know he is not at this moment in misery, without bread to eat? He must be found! My only hope of bearing up against the shock that has fallen on me, is the hope of doing something which *she* would have approved. You must know more, Mrs. Goldstraw, than you have told me yet. Who was the stranger who adopted the child? You must have heard the lady's name?"

"I never heard it, sir. I have never seen her, or heard of her, since."

"Did she say nothing when she took the child away? Search your memory. She must have said something."

"Only one thing, sir, that I can remember. It was a miserably bad season, that year; and many of the children were suffering from it. When she took the baby away, the lady said to me, laughing, 'Don't be alarmed about his health. He will be brought up in a better climate than this—I am going to take him to Switzerland.'"

"To Switzerland? What part of Switzerland?"

"She didn't say, sir."

"Only that faint clue!" said Mr. Wilding. "And a quarter of a century has passed since the child was taken away! What am I to do?"

"I hope you won't take offence at my freedom, sir," said Mrs. Goldstraw; "but why should you distress yourself about what is to be done? He may not be alive now, for anything you know. And, if he is alive, it's not likely he can be in any distress. The lady who adopted him was a bred and born lady—it was easy to see that. And she must have satisfied them at the Foundling that she could provide for the child, or they would never have let her take him away. If I was in your place, sir—please to excuse my saying so—I should comfort myself with remembering that I had loved that poor lady whose portrait you have got there—truly loved her as my mother, and that she had truly loved me as her son. All she gave to you, she gave for the sake of that love. It never altered while she lived; and it won't alter, I'm sure, as long as *you* live. How can you have a better right, sir, to keep what you have got than that?"

Mr. Wilding's immovable honesty saw the

fallacy in his housekeeper's point of view at a glance.

"You don't understand me," he said. "It's *because* I loved her that I feel it a duty—a sacred duty—to do justice to her son. If he is a living man, I must find him: for my own sake, as well as for his. I shall break down under this dreadful trial, unless I employ myself—actively, instantly employ myself—in doing what my conscience tells me ought to be done. I must speak to my lawyer; I must set my lawyer at work before I sleep to-night." He approached a tube in the wall of the room, and called down through it to the office below. "Leave me for a little, Mrs. Goldstraw," he resumed; "I shall be more composed, I shall be better able to speak to you later in the day. We shall get on well—I hope we shall get on well together—in spite of what has happened. It isn't your fault; I know it isn't your fault. There! there! shake hands; and—and do the best you can in the house—I can't talk about it now."

The door opened as Mrs. Goldstraw advanced towards it; and Mr. Jarvis appeared.

"Send for Mr. Bintrey," said the wine-merchant. "Say I want to see him directly."

The clerk unconsciously suspended the execution of the order, by announcing "Mr. Vendale," and showing in the new partner in the firm of Wilding and Co.

"Pray excuse me for one moment, George Vendale," said Wilding. "I have a word to say to Jarvis. Send for Mr. Bintrey," he repeated—"send at once."

Mr. Jarvis laid a letter on the table before he left the room.

"From our correspondents at Neuchâtel, I think, sir. The letter has got the Swiss postmark."

#### NEW CHARACTERS ON THE SCENE.

The words, "The Swiss Postmark," following so soon upon the housekeeper's reference to Switzerland, wrought Mr. Wilding's agitation to such a remarkable height, that his new partner could not decently make a pretence of letting it pass unnoticed.

"Wilding," he asked hurriedly, and yet stopping short and glancing around as if for some visible cause of his state of mind: "what is the matter?"

"My good George Vendale," returned the wine-merchant, giving his hand with an appealing look, rather as if he wanted help to get over some obstacle, than as if he gave it in welcome or salutation: "my good George Vendale, so much is the matter, that I shall never be myself again. It is impossible that I can ever be myself again. For, in fact, I am not myself."

The new partner, a brown-cheeked handsome fellow, of about his own age, with a quick determined eye and an impulsive manner, retorted with natural astonishment: "Not yourself?"

"Not what I supposed myself to be," said Wilding.

"What, in the name of wonder, *did* you suppose yourself to be that you are not?" was the rejoinder, delivered with a cheerful frankness, inviting confidence from a more reticent man. "I may ask without impertinence, now that we are partners."

"There again!" cried Wilding, leaning back in his chair, with a lost look at the other. "Partners! I had no right to come into this business. It was never meant for me. My mother never meant it should be mine. I mean, his mother meant it should be his—if I mean anything—or if I am anybody."

"Come, come," urged his partner, after a moment's pause, and taking possession of him with that calm confidence which inspires a strong nature when it honestly desires to aid a weak one. "Whatever has gone wrong, has gone wrong through no fault of yours, I am very sure. I was not in this counting-house with you under the old *régime*, for three years, to doubt you, Wilding. We were not younger men than we are, together, for that. Let me begin our partnership by being a serviceable partner, and setting right whatever is wrong. Has that letter anything to do with it?"

"Hah!" said Wilding, with his hand to his temple. "There again! My head! I was forgetting the coincidence. The Swiss postmark."

"At a second glance I see that the letter is unopened, so it is not very likely to have much to do with the matter," said Vendale, with comforting composure. "Is it for you, or for us?"

"For us," said Wilding.

"Suppose I open it and read it aloud, to get it out of our way?"

"Thank you, thank you."

"The letter is only from our champagne-making friends, the House at Neuchâtel. 'Dear Sir. We are in receipt of yours of the 28th ult., informing us that you have taken your Mr. Vendale into partnership, whereon we beg you to receive the assurance of our felicitations. Permit us to embrace the occasion of specially commending to you, M. Jules Obenreizer.' Impossible!"

Wilding looked up in quick apprehension, and cried, "Eh?"

"Impossible sort of name," returned his partner, slightly—"Obenreizer. —Of specially commending to you M. Jules Obenreizer, of Soho-square, London (north side), henceforth fully accredited as our agent, and who has already had the honour of making the acquaintance of your Mr. Vendale, in his (said M. Obenreizer's) native country, Switzerland.' To be sure: pooh pooh, what have I been thinking of! I remember now; 'when travelling with his niece.'"

"With his —?" Vendale had so slurred the last word, that Wilding had not heard it.

"When travelling with his Niece. Obenreizer's Niece," said Vendale, in a somewhat superfluously lucid manner. "Niece of Obenreizer. (I met them in my first Swiss tour, travelled a little with them, and lost them for two years; met them again, my Swiss tour before last, and

have lost them ever since.) Obenreizer. Niece of Obenreizer. To be sure! Possible sort of name, after all! 'M. Obenreizer is in possession of our absolute confidence, and we do not doubt you will esteem his merits.' Duly signed by the House, 'Defresnier et C<sup>ie</sup>.' Very well. I undertake to see M. Obenreizer presently, and clear him out of the way. That clears the Swiss postmark out of the way. So now, my dear Wilding, tell me what I can clear out of *your* way, and I'll find a way to clear it."

More than ready and grateful to be thus taken charge of, the honest wine-merchant wrung his partner's hand, and, beginning his tale by pathetically declaring himself an Impostor, told it.

"It was on this matter, no doubt, that you were sending for Bintrey when I came in?" said his partner, after reflecting.

"It was."

"He has experience and a shrewd head; I shall be anxious to know his opinion. It is bold and hazardous in me to give you mine before I know his, but I am not good at holding back. Plainly, then, I do not see these circumstances as you see them. I do not see your position as you see it. As to your being an Impostor, my dear Wilding, that is simply absurd, because no man can be that without being a consenting party to an imposition. Clearly you never were so. As to your enrichment by the lady who believed you to be her son, and whom you were forced to believe, on her own showing, to be your mother, consider whether that did not arise out of the personal relations between you. You gradually became much attached to her; she gradually became much attached to you. It was on you, personally you, as I see the case, that she conferred these worldly advantages; it was from her, personally her, that you took them."

"She supposed me," objected Wilding, shaking his head, "to have a natural claim upon her, which I had not."

"I must admit that," replied his partner, "to be true. But if she had made the discovery that you have made, six months before she died, do you think it would have cancelled the years you were together, and the tenderness that each of you had conceived for the other, each on increasing knowledge of the other?"

"What I think," said Wilding, simply but stoutly holding to the bare fact, "can no more change the truth than it can bring down the sky. The truth is that I stand possessed of what was meant for another man."

"He may be dead," said Vendale.

"He may be alive," said Wilding. "And if he is alive, have I not—innocently, I grant you innocently—robbed him of enough? Have I not robbed him of all the happy time that I enjoyed in his stead? Have I not robbed him of the exquisite delight that filled my soul when that dear lady," stretching his hand towards the picture, "told me she was my mother? Have I not robbed him of all the care she lavished on me? Have I not even robbed him of all the devotion and duty that I so proudly gave to

her? Therefore it is that I ask myself, George Vendale, and I ask you, where is he? What has become of him?"

"Who can tell!"

"I must try to find out who can tell. I must institute inquiries. I must never desist from prosecuting inquiries. I will live upon the interest of my share—I ought to say his share—in this business, and will lay up the rest for him. When I find him, I may perhaps throw myself upon his generosity; but I will yield up all to him. I will, I swear. As I loved and honoured her," said Wilding, reverently kissing his hand towards the picture, and then covering his eyes with it. "As I loved and honoured her, and have a world of reasons to be grateful to her!" And so broke down again.

His partner rose from the chair he had occupied, and stood beside him with a hand softly laid upon his shoulder. "Walter, I knew you before to-day to be an upright man, with a pure conscience and a fine heart. It is very fortunate for me that I have the privilege to travel on in life so near to so trustworthy a man. I am thankful for it. Use me as your right hand, and rely upon me to the death. Don't think the worse of me if I protest to you that my uppermost feeling at present is a confused, you may call it an unreasonable, one. I feel far more pity for the lady and for you, because you did not stand in your supposed relations, than I can feel for the unknown man (if he ever became a man), because he was unconsciously displaced. You have done well in sending for Mr. Bintrey. What I think will be a part of his advice, I know is the whole of mine. Do not move a step in this serious matter precipitately. The secret must be kept among us with great strictness, for to part with it lightly would be to invite fraudulent claims, to encourage a host of knaves, to let loose a flood of perjury and plotting. I have no more to say now, Walter, than to remind you that you sold me a share in your business, expressly to save yourself from more work than your present health is fit for, and that I bought it expressly to do work, and mean to do it."

With these words, and a parting grip of his partner's shoulder that gave them the best emphasis they could have had, George Vendale betook himself presently to the counting-house, and presently afterwards to the address of M. Jules Obenreizer.

As he turned into Soho-square, and directed his steps towards its north side, a deepened colour shot across his sun-browned face, which Wilding, if he had been a better observer, or had been less occupied with his own trouble, might have noticed when his partner read aloud a certain passage in their Swiss correspondent's letter, which he had not read so distinctly as the rest.

A curious colony of mountaineers has long been enclosed within that small flat London district of Soho. Swiss watchmakers, Swiss silver-chasers, Swiss jewellers, Swiss importers of Swiss musical boxes and Swiss toys of various kinds, draw close together there. Swiss profes-

sors of music, painting, and languages; Swiss artificers in steady work; Swiss couriers, and other Swiss servants chronically out of place; industrious Swiss laundresses and clear-starchers; mysteriously existing Swiss of both sexes; Swiss, creditable and Swiss discreditable; Swiss to be trusted by all means, and Swiss to be trusted by no means; these diverse Swiss particles are attracted to a centre in the district of Soho. Shabby Swiss eating-houses, coffee-houses, and lodging-houses, Swiss drinks and dishes, Swiss service for Sundays, and Swiss schools for week-days, are all to be found there. Even the native-born English taverns drive a sort of broken-English trade; announcing in their windows Swiss whets and drams, and sheltering in their bars Swiss skirmishes of love and animosity on most nights in the year.

When the new partner in Wilding and Co. rang the bell of a door bearing the blunt inscription OBERREIZER on a brass plate—the inner door of a substantial house, whose ground story was devoted to the sale of Swiss clocks—he passed at once into domestic Switzerland. A white-tiled stove for winter-time filled the fireplace of the room into which he was shown, the room's bare floor was laid together in a neat pattern of several ordinary woods, the room had a prevalent air of surface bareness and much scrubbing; and the little square of flowery carpet by the sofa, and the velvet chimney-board with its capacious clock and vases of artificial flowers, contended with that tone, as if, in bringing out the whole effect, a Parisian had adapted a dairy to domestic purposes.

Mimic water was dropping off a mill-wheel under the clock. The visitor had not stood before it, following it with his eyes, a minute, when M. Obenreizer, at his elbow, startled him by saying, in very good English, very slightly clipped: "How do you do? So glad!"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't hear you come in."

"Not at all! Sit, please."

Releasing his visitor's two arms, which he had lightly pinioned at the elbows by way of embrace, M. Obenreizer also sat, remarking, with a smile: "You are well? So glad!" and touching his elbows again.

"I don't know," said Vendale, after exchange of salutations, "whether you may yet have heard of me from your House at Neuchâtel?"

"Ah, yes!"

"In connexion with Wilding and Co.?"

"Ah, surely!"

"Is it not odd that I should come to you, in London here, as one of the Firm of Wilding and Co., to pay the Firm's respects?"

"Not at all! What did I always observe when we were on the mountains? We call them vast; but the world is so little. So little is the world, that one cannot keep away from persons. There are so few persons in the world, that they continually cross and re-cross. So very little is the world, that one cannot get rid of a person. Not," touching his elbows again, with an ingratiatory smile, "that one would desire to get rid of you."



"I hope not, M. Obenreizer."

"Please call me, in your country, Mr. I call myself so, for I love your country. If I could be English! But I am born. And you? Though descended from so fine a family, you have had the condescension to come into trade? Stop though. Wines? Is it trade in England or profession? Not fine art?"

"Mr. Obenreizer," returned Vendale, somewhat out of countenance, "I was but a silly young fellow, just of age, when I first had the pleasure of travelling with you, and when you and I and Mademoiselle your niece—who is well?"

"Thank you. Who is well?"

"—Shared some slight glacier dangers together. If, with a boy's vanity, I rather vaunted my family, I hope I did so as a kind of introduction of myself. It was very weak, and in very bad taste; but perhaps you know our English proverb, 'Live and learn.'"

"You make too much of it," returned the Swiss. "And what the devil! After all, yours was a fine family."

George Vendale's laugh betrayed a little vexation as he rejoined: "Well! I was strongly attached to my parents, and when we first travelled together, Mr. Obenreizer, I was in the first flush of coming into what my father and mother left me. So I hope it may have been, after all, more youthful openness of speech and heart than boastfulness."

"All openness of speech and heart! No boastfulness!" cried Obenreizer. "You tax yourself too heavily. You tax yourself, my faith! as if you was your Government taxing you! Besides, it commenced with me. I remember, that evening in the boat upon the lake, floating among the reflections of the mountains and valleys, the crags and pine woods, which were my earliest remembrance, I drew a word-picture of my sordid childhood. Of our poor hut, by the waterfall which my mother showed to travellers; of the cow-shed where I slept with the cow; of my idiot half-brother always sitting at the door, or limping down the Pass to beg; of my half-sister always spinning, and resting her enormous goitre on a great stone; of my being a famished naked little wretch of two or three years, when they were men and women with hard hands to beat me, I, the only child of my father's second marriage—if it even was a marriage. What more natural than for you to compare notes with me, and say, 'We are as one by age; at that same time I sat upon my mother's lap in my father's carriage, rolling through the rich English streets, all luxury surrounding me, all squalid poverty kept far from me. Such is my earliest remembrance as opposed to yours!'"

Mr. Obenreizer was a black-haired young man of a dark complexion, through whose swarthy skin no red glow ever shone. When colour would have come into another cheek, a hardly discernible beat would come into his, as if the machinery for bringing up the ardent blood were there, but the machinery were dry. He was robustly made, well proportioned, and had

handsome features. Many would have perceived that some surface change in him would have set them more at their ease with him, without being able to define what change. If his lips could have been made much thicker, and his neck much thinner, they would have found their want supplied.

But the great Obenreizer peculiarity was, that a certain nameless film would come over his eyes—apparently by the action of his own will—which would impenetrably veil, not only from those tellers of tales, but from his face at large, every expression save one of attention. It by no means followed that his attention should be wholly given to the person with whom he spoke, or even wholly bestowed on present sounds and objects. Rather, it was a comprehensive watchfulness of everything he had in his own mind, and everything that he knew to be, or suspected to be, in the minds of other men.

At this stage of the conversation, Mr. Obenreizer's film came over him.

"The object of my present visit," said Vendale, "is, I need hardly say, to assure you of the friendliness of Wilding and Co., and of the goodness of your credit with us, and of our desire to be of service to you. We hope shortly to offer you our hospitality. Things are not quite in train with us yet, for my partner, Mr. Wilding, is reorganising the domestic part of our establishment, and is interrupted by some private affairs. You don't know Mr. Wilding, I believe?"

Mr. Obenreizer did not.

"You must come together soon. He will be glad to have made your acquaintance, and I think I may predict that you will be glad to have made his. You have not been long established in London, I suppose, Mr. Obenreizer?"

"It is only now that I have undertaken this agency."

"Mademoiselle your niece—is—not married?"

"Not married."

George Vendale glanced about him, as if for any tokens of her.

"She has been in London?"

"She is in London."

"When, and where, might I have the honour of recalling myself to her remembrance?"

Mr. Obenreizer, discarding his film and touching his visitor's elbows as before, said lightly: "Come up-stairs."

Fluttered enough by the suddenness with which the interview he had sought was coming upon him after all, George Vendale followed up-stairs. In a room over the chamber he had just quitted—a room also Swiss-appointed—a young lady sat near one of three windows, working at an embroidery-frame; and an older lady sat with her face turned close to another white-tiled stove (though it was summer, and the stove was not lighted), cleaning gloves. The young lady wore an unusual quantity of fair bright hair, very prettily braided about a rather rounder white forehead than the average English type, and so her face might have been

a shade—or say a light—rounder than the average English face, and her figure slightly rounder than the figure of the average English girl at nineteen. A remarkable indication of freedom and grace of limb, in her quiet attitude, and a wonderful purity and freshness of colour in her dimpled face and bright grey eyes, seemed fraught with mountain air. Switzerland too, though the general fashion of her dress was English, peeped out of the fanciful bodice she wore, and lurked in the curious clocked red stocking, and in its little silver-buckled shoe. As to the elder lady, sitting with her feet apart upon the lower brass ledge of the stove, supporting a lap-full of gloves while she cleaned one stretched on her left hand, she was a true Swiss impersonation of another kind; from the breadth of her cushion-like back, and the ponderosity of her respectable legs (if the word be admissible), to the black velvet band tied tightly round her throat for the repression of a rising tendency to *goitre*; or, higher still, to her great copper-coloured gold ear-rings; or, higher still, to her head-dress of black gauze stretched on wire.

"Miss Marguerite," said Obenreizer to the young lady, "do you recollect this gentleman?"

"I think," she answered, rising from her seat, surprised and a little confused: "it is Mr. Vendale?"

"I think it is," said Obenreizer, dryly. "Permit me, Mr. Vendale. Madame Dor."

The elder lady by the stove, with the glove stretched on her left hand, like a glove's sign, half got up, half looked over her broad shoulder, and wholly plumped down again and rubbed away.

"Madame Dor," said Obenreizer, smiling, "is so kind as to keep me free from stain or tear. Madame Dor humours my weakness for being always neat, and devotes her time to removing every one of my specks and spots."

Madame Dor, with the stretched glove in the air, and her eyes closely scrutinising its palm, discovered a tough spot in Mr. Obenreizer at that instant, and rubbed hard at him. George Vendale took his seat by the embroidery-frame (having first taken the fair right hand that his entrance had checked), and glanced at the gold cross that dipped into the bodice, with something of the devotion of a pilgrim who had reached his shrine at last. Obenreizer stood in the middle of the room with his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, and became filmy.

"He was saying down-stairs, Miss Obenreizer," observed Vendale, "that the world is so small a place, that people cannot escape one another. I have found it much too large for me since I saw you last."

"Have you travelled so far, then?" she inquired.

"Not so far, for I have only gone back to Switzerland each year; but I could have wished—and indeed I have wished very often—that the little world did not afford such opportunities for long escapes as it does. If it had been less, I might have found my fellow-travellers sooner, you know."

The pretty Marguerite coloured, and very slightly glanced in the direction of Madame Dor.

"You find us at length, Mr. Vendale. Perhaps you may lose us again."

"I trust not. The curious coincidence that has enabled me to find you, encourages me to hope not."

"What is that coincidence, sir, if you please?" A dainty little native touch in this turn of speech, and in its tone, made it perfectly captivating, thought George Vendale, when again he noticed an instantaneous glance towards Madame Dor. A caution seemed to be conveyed in it, rapid flash though it was; so he quietly took heed of Madame Dor from that time forth.

"It is that I happen to have become a partner in a House of business in London, to which Mr. Obenreizer happens this very day to be expressly recommended: and that, too, by another house of business in Switzerland, in which (as it turns out) we both have a commercial interest. He has not told you?"

"Ah!" cried Obenreizer, striking in, filmless. "No. I had not told Miss Marguerite. The world is so small and so monotonous that a surprise is worth having in such a little jog-trot place. It is as he tells you, Miss Marguerite. He, of so fine a family, and so proudly bred, has condescended to trade. To trade! Like us poor peasants who have risen from ditches!"

A cloud crept over the fair brow, and she cast down her eyes.

"Why, it is good for trade!" pursued Obenreizer, enthusiastically. "It ennobles trade! It is the misfortune of trade, it is its vulgarity, that any low people—for example, we poor peasants—may take to it and climb by it. See you, my dear Vendale!" He spoke with great energy. "The father of Miss Marguerite, my eldest half-brother, more than two times your age or mine, if living now, wandered without shoes, almost without rags, from that wretched Pass—wandered—wandered—got to be fed with the mules and dogs at an Inn in the main valley far away—got to be Boy there—got to be Ostler—got to be Waiter—got to be Cook—got to be Landlord. As Landlord, he took me (could he take the idiot beggar his brother, or the spinning monstrosity his sister?) to put as pupil to the famous watchmaker, his neighbour and friend. His wife dies when Miss Marguerite is born. What is his will, and what are his words, to me, when *he* dies, she being between girl and woman? 'All for Marguerite, except so much by the year for you. You are young, but I make her your ward, for you were of the obscurest and the poorest peasantry, and so was I, and so was her mother; we were abject peasants all, and you will remember it.' The thing is equally true of most of my countrymen, now in trade in this your London quarter of Soho. Peasants once; low-born drudging Swiss Peasants. Then how good and great for trade: here, from having been warm, he became playfully jubilant, and touched the young wine-merchant's elbows again with his light embrace: 'to be exalted by gentlemen!'"

"I do not think so," said Marguerite, with a flushed cheek, and a look away from the visitor, that was almost defiant. "I think it is as much exalted by us peasants."

"Fie, fie, Miss Marguerite," said Obenreizer. "You speak in proud England."

"I speak in proud earnest," she answered, quietly resuming her work, "and I am not English, but a Swiss peasant's daughter."

There was a dismissal of the subject in her words, which Vendale could not contend against. He only said in an earnest manner, "I most heartily agree with you, Miss Obenreizer, and I have already said so, as Mr. Obenreizer will bear witness," which he by no means did, "in this house."

Now, Vendale's eyes were quick eyes, and sharply watching Madame Dor by times, noted something in the broad back view of that lady. There was considerable pantomimic expression in her glove-cleaning. It had been very softly done when he spoke with Marguerite, or it had altogether stopped, like the action of a listener. When Obenreizer's peasant-speech came to an end, she rubbed most vigorously, as if applauding it. And once or twice, as the glove (which she always held before her, a little above her face) turned in the air, or as this finger went down, or that went up, he even fancied that it made some telegraphic communication to Obenreizer: whose back was certainly never turned upon it, though he did not seem at all to heed it.

Vendale observed, too, that in Marguerite's dismissal of the subject twice forced upon him to his misrepresentation, there was an indignant treatment of her guardian which she tried to check: as though she would have flamed out against him, but for the influence of fear. He also observed—though this was not much—that he never advanced within the distance of her at which he first placed himself: as though there were limits fixed between them. Neither had he ever spoken of her without the prefix "Miss," though whenever he uttered it, it was with the faintest trace of an air of mockery. And now it occurred to Vendale for the first time that something curious in the man which he had never before been able to define, was definable as a certain subtle essence of mockery that eluded touch or analysis. He felt convinced that Marguerite was in some sort a prisoner as to her free will—though she held her own against those two combined, by the force of her character, which was nevertheless inadequate to her release. To feel convinced of this, was not to feel less disposed to love her than he had always been. In a word, he was desperately in love with her, and thoroughly determined to pursue the opportunity which had opened at last.

For the present, he merely touched upon the pleasure that Wilding and Co. would soon have in entreating Miss Obenreizer to honour their establishment with her presence—a curious old place, though a bachelor house withal—and so did not protract his visit beyond such a visit's ordinary length. Going down stairs, conducted

by his host, he found the Obenreizer counting-house at the back of the entrance-hall, and several shabby men in outlandish garments, hanging about, whom Obenreizer put aside that he might pass, with a few words in *patois*.

"Countrymen," he explained, as he attended Vendale to the door. "Poor compatriots. Grateful and attached, like dogs! Good-bye. To meet again. So glad!"

Two more light touches on his elbows dismissed him into the street.

Sweet Marguerite at her frame, and Madame Dor's broad back at her telegraph, floated before him to Cripple Corner. On his arrival there, Wilding was closeted with Bintrey. The cellar doors happening to be open, Vendale lighted a candle in a cleft stick, and went down for a cellarous stroll. Graceful Marguerite floated before him faithfully, but Madame Dor's broad back remained outside.

The vaults were very spacious, and very old. There had been a stone crypt down there, when bygones were not bygones; some said, part of a monkish refectory; some said, of a chapel; some said, of a Pagan temple. It was all one now. Let who would, make what he liked of a crumbled pillar and a broken arch or so. Old Time had made what *he* liked of it, and was quite indifferent to contradiction.

The close air, the musty smell, and the thunderous rumbling in the streets above, as being out of the routine of ordinary life, went well enough with the picture of pretty Marguerite holding her own against those two. So Vendale went on until, at a turning in the vaults, he saw a light like the light he carried.

"Oh! You are here, are you, Joey?"

"Oughtn't it rather to go, 'Oh! You're here, are you, Master George?' For it's my business to be here. But it ain't yourn."

"Don't grumble, Joey."

"Oh! I don't grumble," returned the Cellarman. "If anything grumbles, it's what I've took in through the pores; it ain't me. Have a care as something in *you* don't begin a-grumbling, Master George. Stop here long enough for the wapours to work, and they'll be at it."

His present occupation consisted of poking his head into the bins, making measurements and mental calculations, and entering them in a rhinoceros-hide-looking note-book, like a piece of himself.

"They'll be at it," he resumed, laying the wooden rod that he measured with, across two casks, entering his last calculation, and straightening his back, "trust 'em! And so you've regularly come into the business, Master George?"

"Regularly. I hope you don't object, Joey?"

"I don't, bless you. But Wapours objects that you're too young. You're both on you too young."

"We shall get over that objection day by day, Joey."

"Aye, Master George; but I shall day by day get over the objection that I'm too old, and

so I shan't be capable of seeing much improvement in you."

The retort so tickled Joey Ladle that he grunted forth a laugh and delivered it again, grunting forth another laugh after the second edition of "improvement in you."

"But what's no laughing matter, Master George," he resumed, straightening his back once more, "is, that Young Master Wilding has gone and changed the luck. Mark my words. He has changed the luck, and he'll find it out. I ain't been down here all my life for nothing! I know by what I notices down here, when it's a-going to rain, when it's a-going to hold up, when it's a-going to blow, when it's a-going to be calm. I know, by what I notices down here, when the luck's changed, quite as well."

"Has this growth on the roof anything to do with your divination?" asked Vendale, holding his light towards a gloomy ragged growth of dark fungus, pendent from the arches with a very disagreeable and repellent effect. "We are famous for this growth in this vault, aren't we?"

"We are, Master George," replied Joey Ladle, moving a step or two away, "and if you'll be advised by me, you'll let it alone."

Taking up the rod just now laid across the two casks, and faintly moving the languid fungus with it, Vendale asked, "Aye, indeed? Why so?"

"Why, not so much because it rises from the casks of wine, and may leave you to judge what sort of stuff a Cellarman takes into himself when he walks in the same all the days of his life, nor yet so much because at a stage of its growth it's maggots, and you'll fetch 'em down upon you," returned Joey Ladle, still keeping away, "as for another reason, Master George."

"What other reason?"

"(I wouldn't keep on touchin' it, if I was you, sir.) I'll tell you if you'll come out of the place. First, take a look at its colour, Master George."

"I am doing so."

"Done, sir. Now, come out of the place."

He moved away with his light, and Vendale followed with his. When Vendale came up with him, and they were going back together, Vendale, eyeing him as they walked through the arches, said: "Well, Joey? The colour."

"Is it like clotted blood, Master George?"

"Like enough, perhaps."

"More than enough, I think," muttered Joey Ladle, shaking his head solemnly.

"Well, say it is like; say it is exactly like. What then?"

"Master George, they do say——"

"Who?"

"How should I know who?" rejoined the Cellarman, apparently much exasperated by the unreasonable nature of the question. "Them! Them as says pretty well everything, you know. How should I know who They are, if you don't?"

"True. Go on."

"They do say that the man that gets by any

accident a piece of that dark growth right upon his breast, will, for sure and certain, die by Murder."

As Vendale laughingly stopped to meet the Cellarman's eyes, which he had fastened on his light while dreamily saying those words, he suddenly became conscious of being struck upon his own breast by a heavy hand. Instantly following with his eyes the action of the hand that struck him—which was his companion's—he saw that it had beaten off his breast a web or clot of the fungus, even then floating to the ground.

For a moment he turned upon the cellarman almost as scared a look as the cellarman turned upon him. But in another moment they had reached the daylight at the foot of the cellar-steps, and before he cheerfully sprang up them, he blew out his candle and the superstition together.

#### EXIT WILDING.

On the morning of the next day, Wilding went out alone, after leaving a message with his clerk. "If Mr. Vendale should ask for me," he said, "or if Mr. Bintrey should call, tell them I am gone to the Foundling." All that his partner had said to him, all that his lawyer, following on the same side, could urge, had left him persisting unshaken in his own point of view. To find the lost man, whose place he had usurped, was now the paramount interest of his life, and to inquire at the Foundling was plainly to take the first step in the direction of discovery. To the Foundling, accordingly, the wine-merchant now went.

The once-familiar aspect of the building was altered to him, as the look of the portrait over the chimney-piece was altered to him. His one dearest association with the place which had sheltered his childhood had been broken away from it for ever. A strange reluctance possessed him, when he stated his business at the door. His heart ached as he sat alone in the waiting-room while the Treasurer of the institution was being sent for to see him. When the interview began, it was only by a painful effort that he could compose himself sufficiently to mention the nature of his errand.

The Treasurer listened with a face which promised all needful attention, and promised nothing more.

"We are obliged to be cautious," he said, when it came to his turn to speak, "about all inquiries which are made by strangers."

"You can hardly consider me a stranger," answered Wilding, simply. "I was one of your poor lost children here, in the bygone time."

The Treasurer politely rejoined that this circumstance inspired him with a special interest in his visitor. But he pressed, nevertheless, for that visitor's motive in making his inquiry. Without further preface, Wilding told him his motive, suppressing nothing.

The Treasurer rose, and led the way into the room in which the registers of the institution



were kept. "All the information which our books can give is heartily at your service," he said. "After the time that has elapsed, I am afraid it is the only information we have to offer you."

The books were consulted, and the entry was found, expressed as follows:

"3rd March, 1836. Adopted, and removed from the Foundling Hospital, a male infant, named Walter Wilding. Name and condition of the person adopting the child—Mrs. Jane Ann Miller, widow. Address—Lime-Tree Lodge, Groombridge Wells. References—the Reverend John Harker, Groombridge Wells; and Messrs. Giles, Jeremie, and Giles, bankers, Lombard-street."

"Is that all?" asked the wine-merchant. "Had you no after-communication with Mrs. Miller?"

"None—or some reference to it must have appeared in this book."

"May I take a copy of the entry?"

"Certainly! You are a little agitated. Let me make the copy for you."

"My only chance, I suppose," said Wilding, looking sadly at the copy, "is to inquire at Mrs. Miller's residence, and to try if her references can help me?"

"That is the only chance I see at present," answered the Treasurer. "I heartily wish I could have been of some further assistance to you."

With those farewell words to comfort him, Wilding set forth on the journey of investigation which began from the Foundling doors. The first stage to make for, was plainly the house of business of the bankers in Lombard-street. Two of the partners in the firm were inaccessible to chance-visitors when he asked for them. The third, after raising certain inevitable difficulties, consented to let a clerk examine the Ledger marked with the initial letter "M." The account of Mrs. Miller, widow, of Groombridge Wells, was found. Two long lines, in faded ink, were drawn across it; and at the bottom of the page there appeared this note: "Account closed, September 30th, 1837."

So the first stage of the journey was reached—and so it ended in No Thoroughfare! After sending a note to Cripple Corner to inform his partner that his absence might be prolonged for some hours, Wilding took his place in the train, and started for the second stage on the journey—Mrs. Miller's residence at Groombridge Wells.

Mothers and children travelled with him; mothers and children met each other at the station; mothers and children were in the shops when he entered them to inquire for Lime-Tree Lodge. Everywhere, the nearest and dearest of human relations showed itself happily in the happy light of day. Everywhere, he was reminded of the treasured delusion from which he had been awakened so cruelly—of the lost memory which had passed from him like a reflection from a glass.

Inquiring here, inquiring there, he could hear

of no such place as Lime-Tree Lodge. Passing a house-agent's office, he went in wearily, and put the question for the last time. The house-agent pointed across the street to a dreary mansion of many windows, which might have been a manufactory, but which was an hotel. "That's where Lime-Tree Lodge stood, sir," said the man, "ten years ago."

The second stage reached, and No Thoroughfare again!

But one chance was left. The clerical reference, Mr. Harker, still remained to be found. Customers coming in at the moment to occupy the house-agent's attention, Wilding went down the street, and, entering a bookseller's shop, asked if he could be informed of the Reverend John Harker's present address.

The bookseller looked unaffectedly shocked and astonished, and made no answer.

Wilding repeated his question.

The bookseller took up from his counter a prim little volume in a binding of sober grey. He handed it to his visitor, open at the title-page. Wilding read:

"The martyrdom of the Reverend John Harker in New Zealand. Related by a former member of his flock."

Wilding put the book down on the counter. "I beg your pardon," he said, thinking a little, perhaps, of his own present martyrdom while he spoke. The silent bookseller acknowledged the apology by a bow. Wilding went out.

Third and last stage, and No Thoroughfare for the third and last time.

There was nothing more to be done; there was absolutely no choice but to go back to London, defeated at all points. From time to time on the return journey, the wine-merchant looked at his copy of the entry in the Foundling Register. There is one among the many forms of despair—perhaps the most pitiable of all—which persists in disguising itself as Hope. Wilding checked himself in the act of throwing the useless morsel of paper out of the carriage window. "It may lead to something yet," he thought. "While I live, I won't part with it. When I die, my executors shall find it sealed up with my will."

Now, the mention of his will set the good wine-merchant on a new track of thought, without diverting his mind from its engrossing subject. He must make his will immediately.

The application of the phrase No Thoroughfare to the case had originated with Mr. Bintrey. In their first long conference following the discovery, that sagacious personage had a hundred times repeated, with an obstructive shake of the head, "No Thoroughfare, Sir, No Thoroughfare. My belief is that there is no way out of this at this time of day, and my advice is, make yourself comfortable where you are."

In the course of the protracted consultation, a magnum of the forty-five-year-old port wine had been produced for the wetting of Mr. Bintrey's legal whistle; but the more clearly he saw his way through the wine, the more emphatically

he did not see his way through the case; repeating as often as he set his glass down empty, "Mr. Wilding, No Thoroughfare. Rest and be thankful."

It is certain that the honest wine-merchant's anxiety to make a will, originated in profound conscientiousness; though it is possible (and quite consistent with his rectitude) that he may unconsciously have derived some feeling of relief from the prospect of delegating his own difficulty to two other men who were to come after him. Be that as it may, he pursued his new track of thought with great ardour, and lost no time in begging George Vendale and Mr. Bintrey to meet him in Cripple Corner and share his confidence.

"Being all three assembled with closed doors," said Mr. Bintrey, addressing the new partner on the occasion, "I wish to observe, before our friend (and my client) entrusts us with his further views, that I have endorsed what I understand from him to have been your advice, Mr. Vendale, and what would be the advice of every sensible man. I have told him that he positively must keep his secret. I have spoken with Mrs. Goldstraw, both in his presence and in his absence; and if anybody is to be trusted (which is a very large IF), I think she is to be trusted to that extent. I have pointed out to our friend (and my client), that to set on foot random inquiries would not only be to raise the Devil, in the likeness of all the swindlers in the kingdom, but would also be to waste the estate. Now, you see, Mr. Vendale, our friend (and my client) does not desire to waste the estate, but, on the contrary, desires to husband it for what he considers—but I can't say I do—the rightful owner, if such rightful owner should ever be found. I am very much mistaken if he ever will be, but never mind that. Mr. Wilding and I are, at least, agreed that the estate is not to be wasted. Now, I have yielded to Mr. Wilding's desire to keep an advertisement at intervals flowing through the newspapers, cautiously inviting any person who may know anything about that adopted infant, taken from the Foundling Hospital, to come to my office; and I have pledged myself that such advertisement shall regularly appear. I have gathered from our friend (and my client) that I meet you here to-day to take his instructions, not to give him advice. I am prepared to receive his instructions, and to respect his wishes; but you will please observe that this does not imply my approval of either as a matter of professional opinion."

Thus Mr. Bintrey; talking quite as much *at* Wilding as *to* Vendale. And yet, in spite of his care for his client, he was so amused by his client's Quixotic conduct, as to eye him from time to time with twinkling eyes, in the light of a highly comical curiosity.

"Nothing," observed Wilding, "can be clearer. I only wish my head were as clear as yours, Mr. Bintrey."

"If you feel that singing in it, coming on," hinted the lawyer, with an alarmed glance, "put it off.—I mean the interview."

"Not at all, I thank you," said Wilding.

"What was I going to—?"

"Don't excite yourself, Mr. Wilding," urged the lawyer.

"No; I *wasn't* going to," said the wine-merchant. "Mr. Bintrey and George Vendale, would you have any hesitation or objection to become my joint trustees and executors, or can you at once consent?"

"I consent," replied George Vendale, readily.

"I consent," said Bintrey, not so readily.

"Thank you both. Mr. Bintrey, my instructions for my last will and testament are short and plain. Perhaps you will now have the goodness to take them down. I leave the whole of my real and personal estate, without any exception or reservation whatsoever, to you two, my joint trustees and executors, in trust to pay over the whole to the true Walter Wilding, if he shall be found and identified within two years after the day of my death. Failing that, in trust to you two to pay over the whole as a benefaction and legacy to the Foundling Hospital."

"Those are all your instructions, are they, Mr. Wilding?" demanded Bintrey, after a blank silence, during which nobody had looked at anybody.

"The whole."

"And as to those instructions, you have absolutely made up your mind, Mr. Wilding?"

"Absolutely, decidedly, finally."

"It only remains," said the lawyer, with one shrug of his shoulders, "to get them into technical and binding form, and to execute and attest. Now, does that press? Is there any hurry about it? You are not going to die yet, sir."

"Mr. Bintrey," answered Wilding, gravely, "when I am going to die is within other knowledge than yours or mine. I shall be glad to have this matter off my mind, if you please."

"We are lawyer and client again," rejoined Bintrey, who, for the nonce, had become almost sympathetic. "If this day week—here, at the same hour—will suit Mr. Vendale and yourself, I will enter in my Diary that I attend you accordingly."

The appointment was made, and in due sequence kept. The will was formally signed, sealed, delivered, and witnessed, and was carried off by Mr. Bintrey for safe storage among the papers of his clients, ranged in their respective iron boxes, with their respective owners' names outside, on iron tiers in his consulting-room, as if that legal sanctuary were a condensed Family Vault of Clients.

With more heart than he had lately had for former subjects of interest, Wilding then set about completing his patriarchal establishment, being much assisted not only by Mrs. Goldstraw but by Vendale too: who, perhaps, had in his mind the giving of an Obenreizer dinner as soon as possible. Anyhow, the establishment being reported in sound working order, the Obenreizers, Guardian and Ward, were asked to

dinner, and Madame Dor was included in the invitation. If Vendale had been over head and ears in love before—a phrase not to be taken as implying the faintest doubt about it—this dinner plunged him down in love ten thousand fathoms deep. Yet, for the life of him, he could not get one word alone with charming Marguerite. So surely as a blessed moment seemed to come, Obenreizer, in his filmy state, would stand at Vendale's elbow, or the broad back of Madame Dor would appear before his eyes. That speechless matron was never seen in a front view, from the moment of her arrival to that of her departure—except at dinner. And from the instant of her retirement to the drawing-room, after a hearty participation in that meal, she turned her face to the wall again.

Yet, through four or five delightful though distracting hours, Marguerite was to be seen, Marguerite was to be heard, Marguerite was to be occasionally touched. When they made the round of the old dark cellars, Vendale led her by the hand; when she sang to him in the lighted room at night, Vendale, standing by her, held her relinquished gloves, and would have bartered against them every drop of the forty-five year old, though it had been forty-five times forty-five years old, and its nett price forty-five times forty-five pounds per dozen. And still, when she was gone, and a great gap of an extinguisher was clapped on Cripple Corner, he tormented himself by wondering, Did she think that he admired her! Did she think that he adored her! Did she suspect that she had won him, heart and soul! Did she care to think at all about it! And so, Did she and Didn't she, up and down the gamut, and above the line and below the line, dear, dear! Poor restless heart of humanity! To think that the men who were mummies thousands of years ago, did the same, and ever found the secret how to be quiet after it!

"What do you think, George," Wilding asked him next day, "of Mr. Obenreizer? (I wont ask you what you think of Miss Obenreizer)."

"I don't know," said Vendale, "and I never did know, what to think of him."

"He is well informed and clever," said Wilding.

"Certainly clever."

"A good musician." (He had played very well, and sung very well, overnight.)

"Unquestionably a good musician."

"And talks well."

"Yes," said George Vendale, ruminating, "and talks well. Do you know, Wilding, it oddly occurs to me, as I think about him, that he doesn't keep silence well!"

"How do you mean? He is not obtrusively talkative."

"No, and I don't mean that. But when he is silent, you can hardly help vaguely, though perhaps most unjustly, mistrusting him. Take people whom you know and like. Take any one you know and like."

"Soon done, my good fellow," said Wilding. "I take you."

"I didn't bargain for that, or foresee it," returned Vendale, laughing. "However, take me. Reflect for a moment. Is your approving knowledge of my interesting face, mainly founded (however various the momentary expressions it may include) on my face when I am silent?"

"I think it is," said Wilding.

"I think so too. Now, you see, when Obenreizer speaks—in other words, when he is allowed to explain himself away—he comes out right enough; but when he has not the opportunity of explaining himself away, he comes out rather wrong. Therefore it is, that I say he does not keep silence well. And passing hastily in review such faces as I know, and don't trust, I am inclined to think, now I give my mind to it, that none of them keep silence well."

This proposition in Physiognomy being new to Wilding, he was at first slow to admit it, until asking himself the question whether Mrs. Goldstraw kept silence well, and remembering that her face in repose decidedly invited trustfulness, he was as glad as men usually are to believe what they desire to believe.

But, as he was very slow to regain his spirits or his health, his partner, as another means of setting him up—and perhaps also with contingent Obenreizer views—reminded him of those musical schemes of his in connexion with his family, and how a singing-class was to be formed in the house, and a Choir in a neighbouring church. The class was established speedily, and, two or three of the people having already some musical knowledge, and singing tolerably, the Choir soon followed. The latter was led and chiefly taught, by Wilding himself: who had hopes of converting his dependents into so many Foundlings, in respect of their capacity to sing sacred choruses.

Now, the Obenreizers being skilled musicians it was easily brought to pass that they should be asked to join these musical unions. Guardian and Ward consenting, or Guardian consenting for both, it was necessarily brought to pass that Vendale's life became a life of absolute thralldom and enchantment. For, in the mouldy Christopher-Wren church on Sundays, with its dearly beloved brethren assembled and met together, five-and-twenty strong, was not that Her voice that shot like light into the darkest places, thrilling the walls and pillars as though they were pieces of his heart! What time, too, Madame Dor in a corner of the high pew, turning her back upon everybody and everything, could not fail to be Ritualistically right at some moment of the service; like the man whom the doctors recommended to get drunk once a month, and who, that he might not overlook it, got drunk every day.

But, even those seraphic Sundays were surpassed by the Wednesday concerts established for the patriarchal family. At those concerts she would sit down to the piano and sing them, in her own tongue, songs of her own land, songs calling from the mountain-tops to Vendale, "Rise above the grovelling level country; come far away from the crowd; pursue me as I mount higher, higher, higher,

melting into the azure distance; rise to my supremest height of all, and love me here!" Then would the pretty bodice, the clocked stocking, and the silver-buckled shoe be, like the broad forehead and the bright eyes, fraught with the spring of a very chamois, until the strain was over.

Not even over Vendale himself did these songs of hers cast a more potent spell than over Joey Ladle in his different way. Steadily refusing to muddle the harmony by taking any share in it, and evincing the supremest contempt for scales and such like rudiments of music—which, indeed, seldom captivate mere listeners—Joey did at first give up the whole business for a bad job, and the whole of the performers for a set of howling Dervishes. But, descrying traces of unmuddled harmony in a part-song one day, he gave his two under-cellarmen faint hopes of getting on towards something in course of time. An anthem of Handel's led to further encouragement from him; though he objected that that great musician must have been down in some of them foreign cellars pretty much, for to go and say the same thing so many times over; which, took it in how you might, he considered a certain sign of your having took it in somehow. On a third occasion, the public appearance of Mr. Jarvis with a flute, and of an odd man with a violin, and the performance of a duet by the two, did so astonish him that, solely of his own impulse and motion, he became inspired with the words, "Ann Koar!" repeatedly pronouncing them as if calling in a familiar manner for some lady who had distinguished herself in the orchestra. But this was his final testimony to the merits of his mates, for, the instrumental duet being performed at the first Wednesday concert, and being presently followed by the voice of Marguerite Obenreizer, he sat with his mouth wide open, entranced, until she had finished; when, rising in his place with much solemnity, and prefacing what he was about to say with a bow that specially included Mr. Wilding in it, he delivered himself of the gratifying sentiment: "Arter that, ye may all on ye get to bed!" And ever afterwards declined to render homage in any other words to the musical powers of the family.

Thus began a separate personal acquaintance between Marguerite Obenreizer and Joey Ladle. She laughed so heartily at his compliment, and yet was so abashed by it, that Joey made bold to say to her, after the concert was over, he hoped he wasn't so muddled in his head as to have took a liberty? She made him a gracious reply, and Joey ducked in return.

"You'll change the luck time about, Miss," said Joey, ducking again. "It's such as you n the place that can bring round the luck of the place."

"Can I? Round the uck?" she answered, in her pretty English, and with a pretty wonder. "I fear I do not understand. I am so stupid."

"Young Master Wilding, Miss," Joey ex-

plained confidentially, though not much to her enlightenment, "changed the luck, afore he took in young Master George. So I say, and so they'll find. Lord! Only come into the place and sing over the luck a few times, Miss, and it won't be able to help itself!"

With this, and with a whole brood of ducks, Joey backed out of the presence. But Joey being a privileged person, and even an involuntary conquest being pleasant to youth and beauty, Marguerite merrily looked out for him next time.

"Where is my Mr. Joey, please?" she asked of Vendale.

So Joey was produced and shaken hands with, and that became an Institution.

Another Institution arose in this wise. Joey was a little hard of hearing. He himself said it was "Wapours," and perhaps it might have been; but whatever the cause of the effect, there the effect was, upon him. On this first occasion he had been seen to sidle along the wall, with his left hand to his left ear, until he had sidled himself into a seat pretty near the singer, in which place and position he had remained, until addressing to his friends the amateurs the compliment before mentioned. It was observed on the following Wednesday that Joey's action as a Pecking Machine was impaired at dinner, and it was rumoured about the table that this was explainable by his high-strung expectations of Miss Obenreizer's singing, and his fears of not getting a place where he could hear every note and syllable. The rumour reaching Wilding's ears, he in his good nature called Joey to the front at night before Marguerite began. Thus the Institution came into being that on succeeding nights, Marguerite, running her hands over the keys before singing, always said to Vendale, "Where is my Mr. Joey, please?" and that Vendale always brought him forth, and stationed him near by. That he should then, when all eyes were upon him, express in his face the utmost contempt for the exertions of his friends and confidence in Marguerite alone, whom he would stand contemplating, not unlike the rhinoceros out of the spelling-book, tamed and on his hind legs, was a part of the Institution. Also that when he remained after the singing in his most ecstatic state, some bold spirit from the back should say, "What do you think of it, Joey?" and he should be goaded to reply, as having that instant conceived the retort, "Arter that ye may all on ye get to bed!" These were other parts of the Institution.

But, the simple pleasures and small jests of Cripple Corner were not destined to have a long life. Underlying them from the first was a serious matter, which every member of the patriarchal family knew of, but which, by tacit agreement, all forbore to speak of. Mr. Wilding's health was in a bad way.

He might have overcome the shock he had sustained in the one great affection of his life, or he might have overcome his consciousness of being in the enjoyment of another man's pro-



perty; but the two together were too much for him. A man haunted by twin ghosts, he became deeply depressed. The inseparable spectres sat at the board with him, ate from his platter, drank from his cup, and stood by his bedside at night. When he recalled his supposed mother's love, he felt as though he had stolen it. When he rallied a little under the respect and attachment of his dependents, he felt as though he were even fraudulent in making them happy, for that should have been the unknown man's duty and gratification.

Gradually, under the pressure of his brooding mind, his body stooped, his step lost its elasticity, his eyes were seldom lifted from the ground. He knew he could not help the deplorable mistake that had been made, but he knew he could not mend it; for the days and weeks went by, and no one claimed his name or his possessions. And now there began to creep over him, a cloudy consciousness of often-recurring confusion in his head. He would unaccountably lose, sometimes whole hours, sometimes a whole day and night. Once, his remembrance stopped as he sat at the head of the dinner-table, and was blank until daybreak. Another time, it stopped as he was beating time to their singing, and went on again when he and his partner were walking in the courtyard by the light of the moon, half the night later. He asked Vendale (always full of consideration, work, and help) how this was? Vendale only replied, "You have not been quite well; that's all." He looked for explanation into the faces of his people. But they would put it off with, "Glad to see you looking so much better, sir;" or "Hope you're doing nicely now, sir;" in which was no information at all.

At length, when the partnership was but five months old, Walter Wilding took to his bed, and his housekeeper became his nurse.

"Lying here, perhaps you will not mind my calling you Sally, Mrs. Goldstraw?" said the poor wine-merchant.

"It sounds more natural to me, sir, than any other name, and I like it better."

"Thank you, Sally. I think, Sally, I must of late have been subject to fits. Is that so, Sally? Don't mind telling me now."

"It has happened, sir."

"Ah! That is the explanation!" he quietly remarked. "Mr. Obenreizer, Sally, talks of the world being so small that it is not strange how often the same people come together, and come together, at various places, and in various stages of life. But it does seem strange, Sally, that I should, as I may say, come round to the Foundling to die."

He extended his hand to her, and she gently took it.

"You are not going to die, dear Mr. Wilding."

"So Mr. Bintrey said, but I think he was wrong. The old child-feeling is coming back upon me, Sally. The old hush and rest, as I used to fall asleep."

After an interval he said, in a placid voice, "Please kiss me, Nurse," and, it was evident, believed himself to be lying in the old Dormitory.

As she had been used to bend over the fatherless and motherless children, Sally bent over the fatherless and motherless man, and put her lips to his forehead, murmuring:

"God bless you!"

"God bless you!" he replied, in the same tone.

After another interval, he opened his eyes in his own character, and said: "Don't move me, Sally, because of what I am going to say; I lie quite easily. I think my time is come. I don't know how it may appear to you, Sally, but——"

Insensibility fell upon him for a few minutes; he emerged from it once more.

"—I don't know how it may appear to you, Sally, but so it appears to me."

When he had thus conscientiously finished his favourite sentence, his time came, and he died.

## ACT II.

### VENDALE MAKES LOVE.

The summer and the autumn had passed. Christmas and the New Year were at hand.

As executors honestly bent on performing their duty towards the dead, Vendale and Bintrey had held more than one anxious consultation on the subject of Wilding's will. The lawyer had declared, from the first, that it was simply impossible to take any useful action in the matter at all. The only obvious inquiries to make, in relation to the lost man, had been made already by Wilding himself; with this result, that time and death together had not left a trace of him discoverable. To advertise for the claimant to the property, it would be necessary to mention particulars—a course of proceeding which would invite half the impostors in England to present themselves in the character of the true Walter Wilding. "If we find a chance of tracing the lost man, we will take it. If we don't, let us meet for another consultation on the first anniversary of Wilding's death." So Bintrey advised. And so, with the most earnest desire to fulfil his dead friend's wishes, Vendale was fain to let the matter rest for the present.

Turning from his interest in the past to his interest in the future, Vendale still found himself confronting a doubtful prospect. Months on months had passed since his first visit to Soho-square—and through all that time, the one language in which he had told Marguerite that he loved her was the language of the eyes, assisted, at convenient opportunities, by the language of the hand.

What was the obstacle in his way? The one immovable obstacle which had been in his way from the first. No matter how fairly the opportunities looked, Vendale's efforts to speak with Marguerite alone, ended invariably in one and the same result. Under the most accidental circumstances, in the most innocent manner possible, Obenreizer was always in the way.

With the last days of the old year came an unexpected chance of spending an evening with

Marguerite, which Vendale resolved should be a chance of speaking privately to her as well. A cordial note from Obenreizer invited him, on New Year's Day, to a little family dinner in Soho-square. "We shall be only four," the note said. "We shall be only two," Vendale determined, "before the evening is out!"

New Year's Day, among the English, is associated with the giving and receiving of dinners, and with nothing more. New Year's Day, among the foreigners, is the grand opportunity of the year for the giving and receiving of presents. It is occasionally possible to acclimatise a foreign custom. In this instance Vendale felt no hesitation about making the attempt. His one difficulty was to decide what his New Year's gift to Marguerite should be. The defensive pride of the peasant's daughter—morbidly sensitive to the inequality between her social position and his—would be secretly roused against him if he ventured on a rich offering. A gift, which a poor man's purse might purchase, was the one gift that could be trusted to find its way to her heart, for the giver's sake. Stoutly resisting temptation, in the form of diamonds and rubies, Vendale bought a brooch of the flaggee-work of Genoa—the simplest and most unpretending ornament that he could find in the jeweller's shop.

He slipped his gift into Marguerite's hand as she held it out to welcome him on the day of the dinner.

"This is your first New Year's Day in England," he said. "Will you let me help to make it like a New Year's Day at home?"

She thanked him, a little constrainedly, as she looked at the jeweller's box, uncertain what it might contain. Opening the box, and discovering the studiously simple form under which Vendale's little keepsake offered itself to her, she penetrated his motive on the spot. Her face turned on him brightly, with a look which said, "I own you have pleased and flattered me." Never had she been so charming, in Vendale's eyes, as she was at that moment. Her winter dress—a petticoat of dark silk, with a bodice of black velvet rising to her neck, and enclosing it softly in a little circle of swansdown—heightened, by all the force of contrast, the dazzling fairness of her hair and her complexion. It was only when she turned aside from him to the glass, and, taking out the brooch that she wore, put his New Year's gift in its place, that Vendale's attention wandered far enough away from her to discover the presence of other persons in the room. He now became conscious that the hands of Obenreizer were affectionately in possession of his elbows. He now heard the voice of Obenreizer thanking him for his attention to Marguerite, with the faintest possible ring of mockery in its tone. ("Such a simple present, dear sir! and showing such nice tact!") He now discovered, for the first time, that there was one other guest, and but one, besides himself, whom Obenreizer presented as a compatriot and friend. The friend's face was mouldy, and the friend's figure was fat. His age was suggestive of the autumnal period of human life.

In the course of the evening he developed two extraordinary capacities. One was a capacity for silence; the other was a capacity for emptying bottles.

Madame Dor was not in the room. Neither was there any visible place reserved for her when they sat down to table. Obenreizer explained that it was "the good Dor's simple habit to dine always in the middle of the day. She would make her excuses later in the evening." Vendale wondered whether the good Dor had, on this occasion, varied her domestic employment from cleaning Obenreizer's gloves to cooking Obenreizer's dinner. This at least was certain—the dishes served were, one and all, as achievements in cookery, high above the reach of the rude elementary art of England. The dinner was unobtrusively perfect. As for the wine, the eyes of the speechless friend rolled over it, as in solemn ecstasy. Sometimes he said "Good!" when a bottle came in full; and sometimes he said "Ah!" when a bottle went out empty—and there his contributions to the gaiety of the evening ended.

Silence is occasionally infectious. Oppressed by private anxieties of their own, Marguerite and Vendale appeared to feel the influence of the speechless friend. The whole responsibility of keeping the talk going rested on Obenreizer's shoulders, and manfully did Obenreizer sustain it. He opened his heart in the character of an enlightened foreigner, and sang the praises of England. When other topics ran dry, he returned to this inexhaustible source, and always set the stream running again as copiously as ever. Obenreizer would have given an arm, an eye, or a leg to have been born an Englishman. Out of England there was no such institution as a home, no such thing as a fireside, no such object as a beautiful woman. His dear Miss Marguerite would excuse him, if he accounted for her attractions on the theory that English blood must have mixed at some former time with their obscure and unknown ancestry. Survey this English nation, and behold a tall, clean, plump, and solid people! Look at their cities! What magnificence in their public buildings! What admirable order and propriety in their streets! Admire their laws, combining the eternal principle of justice with the other eternal principle of pounds, shillings, and pence; and applying the product to all civil injuries, from an injury to a man's honour, to an injury to a man's nose! You have ruined my daughter—pounds, shillings, and pence! You have knocked me down with a blow in my face—pounds, shillings, and pence! Where was the material prosperity of such a country as *that* to stop? Obenreizer, projecting himself into the future, failed to see the end of it. Obenreizer's enthusiasm entreated permission to exhale itself, English fashion, in a toast. Here is our modest little dinner over, here is our frugal dessert on the table, and here is the admirer of England conforming to national customs, and making a speech! A toast to your white cliffs of Albion, Mr. Vendale! to your national virtues, your charming climate,

and your fascinating women! to your Hearths, to your Homes, to your Habeas Corpus, and to all your other institutions! In one word—to England! Heep—heep—heep! hooray!

Obenreizer's voice had barely chimed the last note of the English cheer, the speechless friend had barely drained the last drop out of his glass, when the festive proceedings were interrupted by a modest tap at the door. A woman-servant came in, and approached her master with a little note in her hand. Obenreizer opened the note with a frown; and, after reading it with an expression of genuine annoyance, passed it on to his compatriot and friend. Vendale's spirits rose as he watched these proceedings. Had he found an ally in the annoying little note? Was the long-looked-for chance actually coming at last?

"I am afraid there is no help for it?" said Obenreizer, addressing his fellow-countryman. "I am afraid we must go."

The speechless friend handed back the letter, shrugged his heavy shoulders, and poured himself out a last glass of wine. His fat fingers lingered fondly round the neck of the bottle. They pressed it with a little amatory squeeze at parting. His globular eyes looked dimly, as through an intervening haze, at Vendale and Marguerite. His heavy articulation laboured, and brought forth a whole sentence at a birth. "I think," he said, "I should have liked a little more wine." His breath failed him after that effort; he gasped, and walked to the door.

Obenreizer addressed himself to Vendale with an appearance of the deepest distress.

"I am so shocked, so confused, so distressed," he began. "A misfortune has happened to one of my compatriots. He is alone, he is ignorant of your language—I and my good friend, here, have no choice but to go and help him. What can I say in my excuse? How can I describe my affliction at depriving myself in this way of the honour of your company?"

He paused, evidently expecting to see Vendale take up his hat and retire. Discerning his opportunity at last, Vendale determined to do nothing of the kind. He met Obenreizer dexterously, with Obenreizer's own weapons.

"Pray don't distress yourself," he said. "I'll wait here with the greatest pleasure till you come back."

Marguerite blushed deeply, and turned away to her embroidery-frame in a corner by the window. The film showed itself in Obenreizer's eyes, and the smile came something sourly to Obenreizer's lips. To have told Vendale that there was no reasonable prospect of his coming back in good time would have been to risk offending a man whose favourable opinion was of solid commercial importance to him. Accepting his defeat with the best possible grace, he declared himself to be equally honoured and delighted by Vendale's proposal. "So frank, so friendly, so English!" He bustled about, apparently looking for something he wanted, disappeared for a moment through the folding-doors communicating with the next room, came back with his

hat and coat, and protesting that he would return at the earliest possible moment, embraced Vendale's elbows, and vanished from the scene in company with the speechless friend.

Vendale turned to the corner by the window, in which Marguerite had placed herself with her work. There, as if she had dropped from the ceiling, or come up through the floor—there, in the old attitude, with her face to the stove—sat an Obstacle that had not been foreseen, in the person of Madame Dor! She half got up, half looked over her broad shoulder at Vendale, and plumped down again. Was she at work? Yes. Cleaning Obenreizer's gloves, as before? No; darning Obenreizer's stockings.

The case was now desperate. Two serious considerations presented themselves to Vendale. Was it possible to put Madame Dor into the stove? The stove wouldn't hold her. Was it possible to treat Madame Dor, not as a living woman, but as an article of furniture? Could the mind be brought to contemplate this respectable matron purely in the light of a chest of drawers, with a black gauze head-dress accidentally left on the top of it? Yes, the mind could be brought to do that. With a comparatively trifling effort, Vendale's mind did it. As he took his place on the old-fashioned window-seat, close by Marguerite and her embroidery, a slight movement appeared in the chest of drawers, but no remark issued from it. Let it be remembered that solid furniture is not easy to move, and that it has this advantage in consequence—there is no fear of upsetting it.

Unusually silent and unusually constrained—with the bright colour fast fading from her face, with a feverish energy possessing her fingers—the pretty Marguerite bent over her embroidery, and worked as if her life depended on it. Hardly less agitated himself, Vendale felt the importance of leading her very gently to the avowal which he was eager to make—to the other sweeter avowal still, which he was longing to hear. A woman's love is never to be taken by storm; it yields insensibly to a system of gradual approach. It ventures by the roundabout way, and listens to the low voice. Vendale led her memory back to their past meetings when they were travelling together in Switzerland. They revived the impressions, they recalled the events, of the happy bygone time. Little by little, Marguerite's constraint vanished. She smiled, she was interested, she looked at Vendale, she grew idle with her needle, she made false stitches in her work. Their voices sank lower and lower; their faces bent nearer and nearer to each other as they spoke. And Madame Dor? Madame Dor behaved like an angel. She never looked round; she never said a word; she went on with Obenreizer's stockings. Pulling each stocking up tight over her left arm, and holding that arm aloft from time to time, to catch the light on her work, there were moments, delicate and indescribable moments, when Madame Dor appeared to be sitting upside down, and contemplating one of her own respectable legs elevated in the air. As the minutes wore on, these

elevations followed each other at longer and longer intervals. Now and again, the black gauze head-dress nodded, dropped forward, recovered itself. A little heap of stockings slid softly from Madame Dor's lap, and remained unnoticed on the floor. A prodigious ball of worsted followed the stockings, and rolled lazily under the table. The black gauze head-dress nodded, dropped forward, recovered itself, nodded again, dropped forward again, and recovered itself no more. A composite sound, partly as of the purring of an immense cat, partly as of the planing of a soft board, rose over the hushed voices of the lovers, and hummed at regular intervals through the room. Nature and Madame Dor had combined together in Vendale's interests. The best of women was asleep.

Marguerite rose to stop—not the snoring—let us say, the audible repose of Madame Dor. Vendale laid his hand on her arm, and pressed her back gently into her chair.

"Don't disturb her," he whispered. "I have been waiting to tell you a secret. Let me tell it now."

Marguerite resumed her seat. She tried to resume her needle. It was useless; her eyes failed her; her hand failed her; she could find nothing.

"We have been talking," said Vendale, "of the happy time when we first met, and first travelled together. I have a confession to make. I have been concealing something. When we spoke of my first visit to Switzerland, I told you of all the impressions I had brought back with me to England—except one. Can you guess what that one is?"

Her eyes looked steadfastly at the embroidery, and her face turned a little away from him. Signs of disturbance began to appear in her neat velvet bodice, round the region of the brooch. She made no reply. Vendale pressed the question without mercy.

"Can you guess what the one Swiss impression is, which I have not told you yet?"

Her face turned back towards him, and a faint smile trembled on her lips.

"An impression of the mountains, perhaps?" she said, shyly.

"No; a much more precious impression than that."

"Of the lakes?"

"No. The lakes have not grown dearer and dearer in remembrance to me every day. The lakes are not associated with my happiness in the present, and my hopes in the future. Marguerite! all that makes life worth having hangs, for me, on a word from your lips. Marguerite! I love you!"

Her head drooped, as he took her hand. He drew her to him, and looked at her. The tears escaped from her downcast eyes, and fell slowly over her cheeks.

"Oh, Mr. Vendale," she said, sadly, "it would have been kinder to have kept your secret. Have you forgotten the distance between us? It can never, never, be!"

"There can be but one distance between us,

Marguerite—a distance of your making. My love, my darling, there is no higher rank in goodness, there is no higher rank in beauty, than yours! Come! whisper the one little word which tells me you will be my wife!"

She sighed bitterly. "Think of your family," she murmured; "and think of mine!"

Vendale drew her a little nearer to him.

"If you dwell on such an obstacle as that," he said, "I shall think but one thought—I shall think I have offended you."

She started, and looked up. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed, innocently. The instant the words passed her lips, she saw the construction that might be placed on them. Her confession had escaped her in spite of herself. A lovely flush of colour overspread her face. She made a momentary effort to disengage herself from her lover's embrace. She looked up at him entreatingly. She tried to speak. The words died on her lips in the kiss that Vendale pressed on them. "Let me go, Mr. Vendale!" she said, faintly.

"Call me George."

She laid her head on his bosom. All her heart went out to him at last. "George!" she whispered.

"Say you love me!"

Her arms twined themselves gently round his neck. Her lips, timidly touching his cheek, murmured the delicious words—"I love you!"

In the moment of silence that followed, the sound of the opening and closing of the house-door came clear to them through the wintry stillness of the street.

Marguerite started to her feet.

"Let me go!" she said. "He has come back!"

She hurried from the room, and touched Madame Dor's shoulder in passing. Madame Dor woke up with a loud snort, looked first over one shoulder and then over the other, peered down into her lap, and discovered neither stockings, worsted, nor darning-needle in it. At the same moment, footsteps became audible ascending the stairs. "Mon Dieu!" said Madame Dor, addressing herself to the stove, and trembling violently. Vendale picked up the stockings and the ball, and huddled them all back in a heap over her shoulder. "Mon Dieu!" said Madame Dor, for the second time, as the avalanche of worsted poured into her capacious lap.

The door opened, and Obenreizer came in. His first glance round the room showed him that Marguerite was absent.

"What!" he exclaimed, "my niece is away? My niece is not here to entertain you in my absence? This is unpardonable. I shall bring her back instantly."

Vendale stopped him.

"I beg you will not disturb Miss Obenreizer," he said. "You have returned, I see, without your friend?"

"My friend remains, and consoles our afflicted compatriot. A heart-rending scene, Mr. Vendale! The household gods at the pawnbroker's—the family immersed in tears. We all em-



braced in silence. My admirable friend alone possessed his composure. He sent out, on the spot, for a bottle of wine."

"Can I say a word to you in private, Mr. Obenreizer?"

"Assuredly." He turned to Madame Dor. "My good creature, you are sinking for want of repose. Mr. Vendale will excuse you."

Madame Dor rose, and set forth sideways on her journey from the stove to bed. She dropped a stocking. Vendale picked it up for her, and opened one of the folding-doors. She advanced a step, and dropped three more stockings. Vendale, stooping to recover them as before, Obenreizer interfered with profuse apologies, and with a warning look at Madame Dor. Madame Dor acknowledged the look by dropping the whole of the stockings in a heap, and then shuffling away panic-stricken from the scene of disaster. Obenreizer swept up the complete collection fiercely in both hands. "Go!" he cried, giving his prodigious handful a preparatory swing in the air. Madame Dor said, "Mon Dieu," and vanished into the next room, pursued by a shower of stockings.

"What must you think, Mr. Vendale," said Obenreizer, closing the door, "of this deplorable intrusion of domestic details? For myself, I blush at it. We are beginning the New Year as badly as possible; everything has gone wrong to-night. Be seated, pray—and say, what may I offer you? Shall we pay our best respects to another of your noble English institutions? It is my study to be, what you call, jolly. I propose a grog."

Vendale declined the grog with all needful respect for that noble institution.

"I wish to speak to you on a subject in which I am deeply interested," he said. "You must have observed, Mr. Obenreizer, that I have, from the first, felt no ordinary admiration for your charming niece?"

"You are very good. In my niece's name, I thank you."

"Perhaps you may have noticed, latterly, that my admiration for Miss Obenreizer has grown into a tenderer and deeper feeling——?"

"Shall we say friendship, Mr. Vendale?"

"Say love—and we shall be nearer to the truth."

Obenreizer started out of his chair. The faintly discernible beat, which was his nearest approach to a change of colour, showed itself suddenly in his cheeks.

"You are Miss Obenreizer's guardian," pursued Vendale. "I ask you to confer upon me the greatest of all favours—I ask you to give me her hand in marriage."

Obenreizer dropped back into his chair.

"Mr. Vendale," he said, "you petrify me."

"I will wait," rejoined Vendale, "until you have recovered yourself."

"One word before I recover myself. You have said nothing about this to my niece?"

"I have opened my whole heart to your niece. And I have reason to hope——"

"What!" interposed Obenreizer. "You have made a proposal to my niece, without first ask-

ing for my authority to pay your addresses to her?" He struck his hand on the table, and lost his hold over himself for the first time in Vendale's experience of him. "Sir!" he exclaimed, indignantly, "what sort of conduct is this? As a man of honour, speaking to a man of honour, how can you justify it?"

"I can only justify it as one of our English institutions," said Vendale, quietly. "You admire our English institutions. I can't honestly tell you, Mr. Obenreizer, that I regret what I have done. I can only assure you that I have not acted in the matter with any intentional disrespect towards yourself. This said, may I ask you to tell me plainly what objection you see to favouring my suit?"

"I see this immense objection," answered Obenreizer, "that my niece and you are not on a social equality together. My niece is the daughter of a poor peasant; and you are the son of a gentleman. You do us an honour," he added, lowering himself again gradually to his customary polite level, "which deserves, and has, our most grateful acknowledgments. But the inequality is too glaring; the sacrifice is too great. You English are a proud people, Mr. Vendale. I have observed enough of this country to see that such a marriage as you propose would be a scandal here. Not a hand would be held out to your peasant-wife; and all your best friends would desert you."

"One moment," said Vendale, interposing on his side. "I may claim, without any great arrogance, to know more of my country-people in general, and of my own friends in particular, than you do. In the estimation of everybody whose opinion is worth having, my wife herself would be the one sufficient justification of my marriage. If I did not feel certain—observe, I say certain—that I am offering her a position which she can accept without so much as the shadow of a humiliation—I would never (cost me what it might) have asked her to be my wife. Is there any other obstacle that you see? Have you any personal objection to me?"

Obenreizer spread out both his hands in courteous protest. "Personal objection!" he exclaimed. "Dear sir, the bare question is painful to me."

"We are both men of business," pursued Vendale, "and you naturally expect me to satisfy you that I have the means of supporting a wife. I can explain my pecuniary position in two words. I inherit from my parents a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. In half of that sum I have only a life-interest, to which, if I die, leaving a widow, my widow succeeds. If I die, leaving children, the money itself is divided among them, as they come of age. The other half of my fortune is at my own disposal, and is invested in the wine-business. I see my way to greatly improving that business. As it stands at present, I cannot state my return from my capital embarked at more than twelve hundred a year. Add the yearly value of my life-interest—and the total reaches a present annual income of fifteen hundred pounds. I have the fairest prospect of soon making it more. In the

mean time, do you object to me on pecuniary grounds?"

Driven back to his last entrenchment, Obenreizer rose, and took a turn backwards and forwards in the room. For the moment, he was plainly at a loss what to say or do next.

"Before I answer that last question," he said, after a little close consideration with himself, "I beg leave to revert for a moment to Miss Marguerite. You said something just now which seemed to imply that she returns the sentiment with which you are pleased to regard her?"

"I have the inestimable happiness," said Vendale, "of knowing that she loves me."

Obenreizer stood silent for a moment, with the film over his eyes, and the faintly perceptible beat becoming visible again in his cheeks.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes," he said, with ceremonious politeness, "I should like to have the opportunity of speaking to my niece." With those words, he bowed, and quitted the room.

Left by himself, Vendale's thoughts (as a necessary result of the interview, thus far) turned instinctively to the consideration of Obenreizer's motives. He had put obstacles in the way of the courtship; he was now putting obstacles in the way of the marriage—a marriage offering advantages which even his ingenuity could not dispute. On the face of it, his conduct was incomprehensible. What did it mean?

Seeking, under the surface, for the answer to that question—and remembering that Obenreizer was a man of about his own age; also, that Marguerite was, strictly speaking, his half-niece only—Vendale asked himself, with a lover's ready jealousy, whether he had a rival to fear, as well as a guardian to conciliate. The thought just crossed his mind, and no more. The sense of Marguerite's kiss still lingering on his cheek reminded him gently that even the jealousy of a moment was now a treason to *her*.

On reflection, it seemed most likely that a personal motive of another kind might suggest the true explanation of Obenreizer's conduct. Marguerite's grace and beauty were precious ornaments in that little household. They gave it a special social attraction and a special social importance. They armed Obenreizer with a certain influence in reserve, which he could always depend upon to make his house attractive, and which he might always bring more or less to bear on the forwarding of his own private ends. Was he the sort of man to resign such advantages as were here implied, without obtaining the fullest possible compensation for the loss? A connexion by marriage with Vendale offered him solid advantages, beyond all doubt. But there were hundreds of men in London with far greater power and far wider influence than Vendale possessed. Was it possible that this man's ambition secretly looked higher than the highest prospects that could be offered to him by the alliance now proposed for his niece? As the question passed through Vendale's mind, the man himself reappeared—to answer it, or not to answer it, as the event might prove.

A marked change was visible in Obenreizer when he resumed his place. His manner was less assured, and there were plain traces about his mouth of recent agitation which had not been successfully composed. Had he said something, referring either to Vendale or to himself, which had roused Marguerite's spirit, and which had placed him, for the first time, face to face with a resolute assertion of his niece's will? It might or might not be. This only was certain—he looked like a man who had met with a repulse.

"I have spoken to my niece," he began. "I find, Mr. Vendale, that even your influence has not entirely blinded her to the social objections to your proposal."

"May I ask," returned Vendale, "if that is the only result of your interview with Miss Obenreizer?"

A momentary flash leapt out through the Obenreizer film.

"You are master of the situation," he answered, in a tone of sardonic submission. "If you insist on my admitting it, I do admit it in those words. My niece's will and mine used to be one, Mr. Vendale. You have come between us, and her will is now yours. In my country, we know when we are beaten, and we submit with our best grace. I submit, with my best grace, on certain conditions. Let us revert to the statement of your pecuniary position. I have an objection to you, my dear sir—a most amazing, a most audacious objection, from a man in my position to a man in yours."

"What is it?"

"You have honoured me by making a proposal for my niece's hand. For the present (with best thanks and respects), I beg to decline it."

"Why?"

"Because you are not rich enough."

The objection, as the speaker had foreseen, took Vendale completely by surprise. For the moment he was speechless.

"Your income is fifteen hundred a year," pursued Obenreizer. "In my miserable country I should fall on my knees before your income, and say, 'What a princely fortune!' In wealthy England, I sit as I am, and say, 'A modest independence, dear sir; nothing more. Enough, perhaps, for a wife in your own rank of life, who has no social prejudices to conquer. Not more than half enough for a wife who is a meanly born foreigner, and who has all your social prejudices against her.' Sir! if my niece is ever to marry you, she will have what you call uphill work of it in taking her place at starting. Yes, yes; this is not your view, but it remains, immovably remains, my view for all that. For my niece's sake, I claim that this uphill work shall be made as smooth as possible. Whatever material advantages she can have to help her, ought, in common justice, to be hers. Now, tell me, Mr. Vendale, on your fifteen hundred a year can your wife have a house in a fashionable quarter, a footman to open her door, a butler to wait at her table, and a carriage and horses to drive about in? I see the answer in your face—your face says, No.

Very good. Tell me one more thing, and I have done. Take the mass of your educated, accomplished, and lovely countrywomen, is it, or is it not, the fact that a lady who has a house in a fashionable quarter, a footman to open her door, a butler to wait at her table, and a carriage and horses to drive about in, is a lady who has gained four steps, in female estimation, at starting? Yes? or No?"

"Come to the point," said Vendale. "You view this question as a question of terms. What are your terms?"

"The lowest terms, dear sir, on which you can provide your wife with those four steps at starting. Double your present income—the most rigid economy cannot do it in England on less. You said just now that you expected greatly to increase the value of your business. To work—and increase it! I am a good devil after all! On the day when you satisfy me, by plain proofs, that your income has risen to three thousand a year, ask me for my niece's hand, and it is yours."

"May I inquire if you have mentioned this arrangement to Miss Obenreizer?"

"Certainly. She has a last little morsel of regard still left for me, Mr. Vendale, which is not yours yet; and she accepts my terms. In other words, she submits to be guided by her guardian's regard for her welfare, and by her guardian's superior knowledge of the world." He threw himself back in his chair, in firm reliance on his position, and in full possession of his excellent temper.

Any open assertion of his own interests, in the situation in which Vendale was now placed, seemed to be (for the present at least) hopeless. He found himself literally left with no ground to stand on. Whether Obenreizer's objections were the genuine product of Obenreizer's own view of the case, or whether he was simply delaying the marriage in the hope of ultimately breaking it off altogether—in either of these events, any present resistance on Vendale's part would be equally useless. There was no help for it but to yield, making the best terms that he could on his own side.

"I protest against the conditions you impose on me," he began.

"Naturally," said Obenreizer; "I dare say I should protest, myself, in your place."

"Say, however," pursued Vendale, "that I accept your terms. In that case, I must be permitted to make two stipulations on my part. In the first place, I shall expect to be allowed to see your niece."

"Aha! to see my niece? and to make her in as great a hurry to be married as you are yourself? Suppose I say, No? you would see her perhaps without my permission?"

"Decidedly!"

"How delightfully frank! How exquisitely English! You shall see her, Mr. Vendale, on certain days, which we will appoint together. What next?"

"Your objection to my income," proceeded Vendale, "has taken me completely by surprise. I wish to be assured against any repetition of

that surprise. Your present views of my qualification for marriage require me to have an income of three thousand a year. Can I be certain, in the future, as your experience of England enlarges, that your estimate will rise no higher?"

"In plain English," said Obenreizer, "you doubt my word?"

"Do you purpose to take my word for it when I inform you that I have doubled my income?" asked Vendale. "If my memory does not deceive me, you stipulated, a minute since, for plain proofs?"

"Well played, Mr. Vendale! You combine the foreign quickness with the English solidity. Accept my best congratulations. Accept, also, my written guarantee."

He rose; seated himself at a writing-desk at a side-table, wrote a few lines, and presented them to Vendale with a low bow. The engagement was perfectly explicit, and was signed and dated with scrupulous care.

"Are you satisfied with your guarantee?"

"I am satisfied."

"Charmed to hear it, I am sure. We have had our little skirmish—we have really been wonderfully clever on both sides. For the present our affairs are settled. I bear no malice. You bear no malice. Come, Mr. Vendale, a good English shake hands."

Vendale gave his hand, a little bewildered by Obenreizer's sudden transitions from one humour to another.

"When may I expect to see Miss Obenreizer again?" he asked, as he rose to go.

"Honour me with a visit to-morrow," said Obenreizer, "and we will settle it then. Do have a grog before you go! No? Well! well! we will reserve the grog till you have your three thousand a year, and are ready to be married. Aha! When will that be?"

"I made an estimate, some months since, of the capacities of my business," said Vendale. "If that estimate is correct, I shall double my present income—"

"And be married!" added Obenreizer.

"And be married," repeated Vendale, "within a year from this time. Good night."

#### VENDALE MAKES MISCHIEF.

When Vendale entered his office the next morning, the dull commercial routine at Cripple Corner met him with a new face. Marguerite had an interest in it now! The whole machinery which Wilding's death had set in motion, to realise the value of the business—the balancing of ledgers, the estimating of debts, the taking of stock, and the rest of it—was now transformed into machinery which indicated the chances for and against a speedy marriage. After looking over results, as presented by his accountant, and checking additions and subtractions, as rendered by the clerks, Vendale turned his attention to the stock-taking department next, and sent a message to the cellars, desiring to see the report.

The Cellarman's appearance, the moment he put his head in at the door of his master's private room, suggested that something very extraordinary must have happened that morning. There was an approach to alacrity in Joey Ladle's movements! There was something which actually simulated cheerfulness in Joey Ladle's face!

"What's the matter?" asked Vendale. "Anything wrong?"

"I should wish to mention one thing," answered Joey. "Young Mr. Vendale, I have never set myself up for a prophet."

"Who ever said you did?"

"No prophet, as far as I've heard tell of that profession," proceeded Joey, "ever lived principally underground. No prophet, whatever else he might take in at the pores, ever took in wine from morning to night, for a number of years together. When I said to young Master Wilding, respecting his changing the name of the firm, that one of these days he might find he'd changed the luck of the firm—did I put myself forward as a prophet? No, I didn't. Has what I said to him come true? Yes, it has. In the time of Pebbleson Nephew, Young Mr. Vendale, no such thing was ever known as a mistake made in a consignment delivered at these doors. There's a mistake been made now. Please to remark that it happened before Miss Margaret came here. For which reason it don't go against what I've said respecting Miss Margaret singing round the luck. Read that, sir," concluded Joey, pointing attention to a special passage in the report, with a forefinger which appeared to be in process of taking in through the pores nothing more remarkable than dirt. "It's foreign to my nature to crow over the house I serve, but I feel it a kind of a solemn duty to ask you to read that."

Vendale read as follows:—"Note, respecting the Swiss champagne. An irregularity has been discovered in the last consignment received from the firm of Defresnier and Co." Vendale stopped, and referred to a memorandum-book by his side. "That was in Mr. Wilding's time," he said. "The vintage was a particularly good one, and he took the whole of it. The Swiss champagne has done very well, hasn't it?"

"I don't say it's done badly," answered the Cellarman. "It may have got sick in our customers' bins, or it may have bust in our customers' hands. But I don't say it's done badly with us."

Vendale resumed the reading of the note: "We find the number of the cases to be quite correct by the books. But six of them, which present a slight difference from the rest in the brand, have been opened, and have been found to contain a red wine instead of champagne. The similarity in the brands, we suppose, caused a mistake to be made in sending the consignment from Neuchâtel. The error has not been found to extend beyond six cases."

"Is that all!" exclaimed Vendale, tossing the note away from him.

Joey Ladle's eye followed the flying morsel of paper drearily.

"I'm glad to see you take it easy, sir," he said. "Whatever happens, it will be always a comfort to you to remember that you took it easy at first. Sometimes one mistake leads to another. A man drops a bit of orange-peel on the pavement by mistake, and another man treads on it by mistake, and there's a job at the hospital, and a party crippled for life. I'm glad you take it easy, sir. In Pebbleson Nephew's time we shouldn't have taken it easy till we had seen the end of it. Without desiring to crow over the house, Young Mr. Vendale, I wish you well through it. No offence, sir," said the Cellarman, opening the door to go out, and looking in again ominously before he shut it. "I'm muddled and mollen-colly, I grant you. But I'm an old servant of Pebbleson Nephew, and I wish you well through them six cases of red wine."

Left by himself, Vendale laughed, and took up his pen. "I may as well send a line to Defresnier and Company," he thought, "before I forget it." He wrote at once in these terms:

"Dear Sirs. We are taking stock, and a trifling mistake has been discovered in the last consignment of champagne sent by your house to ours. Six of the cases contain red wine—which we hereby return to you. The matter can easily be set right, either by your sending us six cases of the champagne, if they can be produced, or, if not, by your crediting us with the value of six cases on the amount last paid (five hundred pounds) by our firm to yours. Your faithful servants,

"WILDING AND Co."

This letter despatched to the post, the subject dropped at once out of Vendale's mind. He had other and far more interesting matters to think of. Later in the day he paid the visit to Obenreizer which had been agreed on between them. Certain evenings in the week were set apart which he was privileged to spend with Marguerite—always, however, in the presence of a third person. On this stipulation Obenreizer politely but positively insisted. The one concession he made was to give Vendale his choice of who the third person should be. Confiding in past experience, his choice fell unhesitatingly upon the excellent woman who mended Obenreizer's stockings. On hearing of the responsibility entrusted to her, Madame Dor's intellectual nature burst suddenly into a new stage of development. She waited till Obenreizer's eye was off her—and then she looked at Vendale, and dimly winked.

The time passed—the happy evenings with Marguerite came and went. It was the tenth morning since Vendale had written to the Swiss firm, when the answer appeared on his desk, with the other letters of the day:

"Dear Sirs, We beg to offer our excuses for the little mistake which has happened. At the same time, we regret to add that the statement of our error, with which you have favoured us, has led to a very unexpected discovery. The affair is a most serious one for you and for us. The particulars are as follows:

"Having no more champagne of the vintage last



sent to you, we made arrangements to credit your firm with the value of the six cases, as suggested by yourself. On taking this step, certain forms observed in our mode of doing business necessitated a reference to our bankers' book, as well as to our ledger. The result is a moral certainty that no such remittance as you mention can have reached our house, and a literal certainty that no such remittance has been paid to our account at the bank.

"It is needless, at this stage of the proceedings, to trouble you with details. The money has unquestionably been stolen in the course of its transit from you to us. Certain peculiarities which we observe, relating to the manner in which the fraud has been perpetrated, lead us to conclude that the thief may have calculated on being able to pay the missing sum to our bankers, before an inevitable discovery followed the annual striking of our balance. This would not have happened, in the usual course, for another three months. During that period, but for your letter, we might have remained perfectly unconscious of the robbery that has been committed.

"We mention this last circumstance, as it may help to show you that we have to do, in this case, with no ordinary thief. Thus far we have not even a suspicion of who that thief is. But we believe you will assist us in making some advance towards discovery, by examining the receipt (forged, of course) which has no doubt purported to come to you from our house. Be pleased to look and see whether it is a receipt entirely in manuscript, or whether it is a numbered and printed form which merely requires the filling in of the amount. The settlement of this apparently trivial question is, we assure you, a matter of vital importance. Anxiously awaiting your reply, we remain, with high esteem and consideration,

"DEFRESNIER & CO."

Vendale laid the letter on his desk, and waited a moment to steady his mind under the shock that had fallen on it. At the time of all others when it was most important to him to increase the value of his business, that business was threatened with a loss of five hundred pounds. He thought of Marguerite, as he took the key from his pocket and opened the iron chamber in the wall in which the books and papers of the firm were kept.

He was still in the chamber, searching for the forged receipt, when he was startled by a voice speaking close behind him.

"A thousand pardons," said the voice; "I am afraid I disturb you."

He turned, and found himself face to face with Marguerite's guardian.

"I have called," pursued Obenreizer, "to know if I can be of any use. Business of my own takes me away for some days to Manchester and Liverpool. Can I combine any business of yours with it? I am entirely at your disposal, in the character of commercial traveller for the firm of Wilding and Co."

"Excuse me for one moment," said Vendale; "I will speak to you directly." He turned round again, and continued his search among the papers. "You come at a time when friendly offers are more than usually precious to me," he resumed. "I have had very bad news this morning from Neuchâtel."

"Bad news!" exclaimed Obenreizer. "From Defresnier and Company?"

"Yes. A remittance we sent to them has

been stolen. I am threatened with a loss of five hundred pounds. What's that?"

Turning sharply, and looking into the room for the second time, Vendale discovered his envelope-case overthrown on the floor, and Obenreizer on his knees picking up the contents.

"All my awkwardness!" said Obenreizer. "This dreadful news of yours startled me; I stepped back——" He became too deeply interested in collecting the scattered envelopes to finish the sentence.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Vendale. "The clerk will pick the things up."

"This dreadful news!" repeated Obenreizer, persisting in collecting the envelopes. "This dreadful news!"

"If you will read the letter," said Vendale, "you will find I have exaggerated nothing. There it is, open on my desk."

He resumed his search, and in a moment more discovered the forged receipt. It was on the numbered and printed form, described by the Swiss firm. Vendale made a memorandum of the number and the date. Having replaced the receipt and locked up the iron chamber, he had leisure to notice Obenreizer, reading the letter in the recess of a window at the far end of the room.

"Come to the fire," said Vendale. "You look perished with the cold out there. I will ring for some more coals."

Obenreizer rose, and came slowly back to the desk. "Marguerite will be as sorry to hear of this as I am," he said, kindly. "What do you mean to do?"

"I am in the hands of Defresnier and Company," answered Vendale. "In my total ignorance of the circumstances, I can only do what they recommend. The receipt which I have just found, turns out to be the numbered and printed form. They seem to attach some special importance to its discovery. You have had experience, when you were in the Swiss house, of their way of doing business. Can you guess what object they have in view?"

Obenreizer offered a suggestion.

"Suppose I examine the receipt?" he said.

"Are you ill?" asked Vendale, startled by the change in his face, which now showed itself plainly for the first time. "Pray go to the fire. You seem to be shivering—I hope you are not going to be ill?"

"Not I!" said Obenreizer. "Perhaps I have caught cold. Your English climate might have spared an admirer of your English institutions. Let me look at the receipt."

Vendale opened the iron chamber. Obenreizer took a chair, and drew it close to the fire. He held both hands over the flames. "Let me look at the receipt," he repeated, eagerly, as Vendale reappeared with the paper in his hand. At the same moment a porter entered the room with a fresh supply of coals. Vendale told him to make a good fire. The man obeyed the order with a disastrous alacrity. As he stepped forward and raised the scuttle, his foot caught in a fold of the rug, and he discharged his entire cargo of coals into the grate.

The result was an instant smothering of the flame, and the production of a stream of yellow smoke, without a visible morsel of fire to account for it.

"Imbecile!" whispered Obenreizer to himself, with a look at the man which the man remembered for many a long day afterwards.

"Will you come into the clerks' room?" asked Vendale. "They have a stove there."

"No, no. No matter."

Vendale handed him the receipt. Obenreizer's interest in examining it appeared to have been quenched as suddenly and as effectually as the fire itself. He just glanced over the document, and said, "No; I don't understand it! I am sorry to be of no use."

"I will write to Neuchâtel by to-night's post," said Vendale, putting away the receipt for the second time. "We must wait, and see what comes of it."

"By to-night's post," repeated Obenreizer. "Let me see. You will get the answer in eight or nine days' time. I shall be back before that. If I can be of any service, as commercial traveller, perhaps you will let me know between this and then. You will send me written instructions? My best thanks. I shall be most anxious for your answer from Neuchâtel. Who knows? It may be a mistake, my dear friend, after all. Courage! courage! courage!" He had entered the room with no appearance of being pressed for time. He now snatched up his hat, and took his leave with the air of a man who had not another moment to lose.

Left by himself, Vendale took a turn thoughtfully in the room.

His previous impression of Obenreizer was shaken by what he had heard and seen at the interview which had just taken place. He was disposed, for the first time, to doubt whether, in this case, he had not been a little hasty and hard in his judgment on another man. Obenreizer's surprise and regret, on hearing the news from Neuchâtel, bore the plainest marks of being honestly felt—not politely assumed for the occasion. With troubles of his own to encounter, suffering, to all appearance, from the first insidious attack of a serious illness, he had looked and spoken like a man who really deplored the disaster that had fallen on his friend. Hitherto, Vendale had tried vainly to alter his first opinion of Marguerite's guardian, for Marguerite's sake. All the generous instincts in his nature now combined together and shook the evidence which had seemed unanswerable up to this time. "Who knows?" he thought, "I may have read that man's face wrongly, after all."

The time passed—the happy evenings with Marguerite came and went. It was again the tenth morning since Vendale had written to the Swiss firm; and again the answer appeared on his desk with the other letters of the day:

"Dear Sir. My senior partner, M. Defresnier, has been called away, by urgent business, to Milan. In his absence (and with his full concurrence and autho-

riety), I now write to you again on the subject of the missing five hundred pounds.

"Your discovery that the forged receipt is executed upon one of our numbered and printed forms has caused inexpressible surprise and distress to my partner and to myself. At the time when your remittance was stolen, but three keys were in existence opening the strong box in which our receipt-forms are invariably kept. My partner had one key; I had the other. The third was in the possession of a gentleman who, at that period, occupied a position of trust in our house. We should as soon have thought of suspecting one of ourselves as of suspecting this person. Suspicion now points at him, nevertheless. I cannot prevail on myself to inform you who the person is, so long as there is the shadow of a chance that he may come innocently out of the inquiry which must now be instituted. Forgive my silence; the motive of it is good.

"The form our investigation must now take is simple enough. The handwriting on your receipt must be compared, by competent persons whom we have at our disposal, with certain specimens of handwriting in our possession. I cannot send you the specimens, for business reasons, which, when you hear them, you are sure to approve. I must beg you to send me the receipt to Neuchâtel—and, in making this request, I must accompany it by a word of necessary warning.

"If the person, at whom suspicion now points, really proves to be the person who has committed this forgery and theft, I have reason to fear that circumstances may have already put him on his guard. The only evidence against him is the evidence in your hands, and he will move heaven and earth to obtain and destroy it. I strongly urge you not to trust the receipt to the post. Send it to me, without loss of time, by a private hand, and choose nobody for your messenger but a person long established in your own employment, accustomed to travelling, capable of speaking French; a man of courage, a man of honesty, and, above all things, a man who can be trusted to let no stranger scrape acquaintance with him on the route. Tell no one—absolutely no one—but your messenger of the turn this matter has now taken. The safe transit of the receipt may depend on your interpreting *literally* the advice which I give you at the end of this letter.

"I have only to add that every possible saving of time is now of the last importance. More than one of our receipt-forms is missing—and it is impossible to say what new frauds may not be committed, if we fail to lay our hands on the thief.

"Your faithful servant.

"ROLLAND,

("Signing for Defresnier and C<sup>ts</sup>")."

Who was the suspected man? In Vendale's position, it seemed useless to inquire.

Who was to be sent to Neuchâtel with the receipt? Men of courage and men of honesty were to be had at Cripple Corner for the asking. But where was the man who was accustomed to foreign travelling, who could speak the French language, and who could be really relied on to let no stranger scrape acquaintance with him on his route? There was but one man at hand who combined all those requisites in his own person, and that man was Vendale himself.

It was a sacrifice to leave his business; it was a greater sacrifice to leave Marguerite. But a matter of five hundred pounds was in-

volved in the pending inquiry; and a literal interpretation of M. Rolland's advice was insisted on in terms which there was no trifling with. The more Vendale thought of it, the more plainly the necessity faced him, and said, "Go!"

As he locked up the letter with the receipt, the association of ideas reminded him of Obenreizer. A guess at the identity of the suspected man looked more possible now. Obenreizer might know.

The thought had barely passed through his mind, when the door opened, and Obenreizer entered the room.

"They told me at Soho-square you were expected back last night," said Vendale, greeting him. "Have you done well in the country? Are you better?"

A thousand thanks. Obenreizer had done admirably well; Obenreizer was infinitely better. And now, what news? Any letter from Neuchâtel?

"A very strange letter," answered Vendale. "The matter has taken a new turn, and the letter insists—without excepting anybody—on my keeping our next proceedings a profound secret."

"Without excepting anybody?" repeated Obenreizer. As he said the words, he walked away again, thoughtfully, to the window at the other end of the room, looked out for a moment, and suddenly came back to Vendale. "Surely they must have forgotten?" he resumed, "or they would have excepted *me*?"

"It is Monsieur Rolland who writes," said Vendale. "And, as you say, he must certainly have forgotten. That view of the matter quite escaped me. I was just wishing I had you to consult, when you came into the room. And here I am tied by a formal prohibition, which cannot possibly have been intended to include you. How very annoying!"

Obenreizer's filmy eyes fixed on Vendale attentively.

"Perhaps it is more than annoying!" he said. "I came this morning not only to hear the news, but to offer myself as messenger, negotiator—what you will. Would you believe it? I have letters which oblige me to go to Switzerland immediately. Messages, documents, anything—I could have taken them all to Defresnier and Rolland for you."

"You are the very man I wanted," returned Vendale. "I had decided, most unwillingly, on going to Neuchâtel myself, not five minutes since, because I could find no one here capable of taking my place. Let me look at the letter again."

He opened the strong room to get at the letter. Obenreizer, after first glancing round him to make sure that they were alone, followed a step or two and waited, measuring Vendale with his eye. Vendale was the tallest man, and unmistakably the strongest man also of the two. Obenreizer turned away, and warmed himself at the fire.

Meanwhile, Vendale read the last paragraph in the letter for the third time. There was the plain warning—there was the closing sen-

tence, which insisted on a literal interpretation of it. The hand, which was leading Vendale in the dark, led him on that condition only. A large sum was at stake: a terrible suspicion remained to be verified. If he acted on his own responsibility, and if anything happened to defeat the object in view, who would be blamed? As a man of business, Vendale had but one course to follow. He locked the letter up again.

"It is most annoying," he said to Obenreizer—"it is a piece of forgetfulness on Monsieur Rolland's part which puts me to serious inconvenience, and places me in an absurdly false position towards you. What am I to do? I am acting in a very serious matter, and acting entirely in the dark. I have no choice but to be guided, not by the spirit, but by the letter of my instructions. You understand me, I am sure? You know, if I had not been fettered in this way, how gladly I should have accepted your services?"

"Say no more!" returned Obenreizer. "In your place I should have done the same. My good friend, I take no offence. I thank you for your compliment. We shall be travelling companions, at any rate," added Obenreizer. "You go, as I go, at once?"

"At once. I must speak to Marguerite first, of course!"

"Surely! surely! Speak to her this evening. Come, and pick me up on the way to the station. We go together by the mail train to-night?"

"By the mail train to-night."

It was later than Vendale had anticipated when he drove up to the house in Soho-square. Business difficulties, occasioned by his sudden departure, had presented themselves by dozens. A cruelly large share of the time which he had hoped to devote to Marguerite had been claimed by duties at his office which it was impossible to neglect.

To his surprise and delight, she was alone in the drawing-room when he entered it.

"We have only a few minutes, George," she said. "But Madame Dor has been good to me—and we can have those few minutes alone." She threw her arms round his neck, and whispered eagerly, "Have you done anything to offend Mr. Obenreizer?"

"I!" exclaimed Vendale, in amazement.

"Hush!" she said, "I want to whisper it. You know the little photograph I have got of you. This afternoon it happened to be on the chimney-piece. He took it up and looked at it—and I saw his face in the glass. I know you have offended him! He is merciless; he is revengeful; he is as secret as the grave. Don't go with him, George—don't go with him!"

"My own love," returned Vendale, "you are letting your fancy frighten you! Obenreizer and I were never better friends than we are at this moment."

Before a word more could be said, the sudden movement of some ponderous body shook the floor of the next room. The shock was fol-

lowed by the appearance of Madame Dor. "Obenreizer!" exclaimed this excellent person in a whisper, and plumped down instantly in her regular place by the stove.

Obenreizer came in with a courier's bag strapped over his shoulder.

"Are you ready?" he asked, addressing Vendale. "Can I take anything for you? You have no travelling-bag. I have got one. Here is the compartment for papers, open at your service."

"Thank you," said Vendale. "I have only one paper of importance with me; and that paper I am bound to take charge of myself. Here it is," he added, touching the breast-pocket of his coat, "and here it must remain till we get to Neuchâtel."

As he said those words, Marguerite's hand caught his, and pressed it significantly. She was looking towards Obenreizer. Before Vendale could look, in his turn, Obenreizer had wheeled round, and was taking leave of Madame Dor.

"Adieu, my charming niece!" he said, turning to Marguerite next. "En route, my friend, for Neuchâtel!" He tapped Vendale lightly over the breast-pocket of his coat, and led the way to the door.

Vendale's last look was for Marguerite. Marguerite's last words to him were, "Don't go!"

### ACT III.

#### IN THE VALLEY.

It was about the middle of the month of February when Vendale and Obenreizer set forth on their expedition. The winter being a hard one, the time was bad for travellers. So bad was it that these two travellers, coming to Strasbourg, found its great inns almost empty. And even the few people they did encounter in that city, who had started from England or from Paris on business journeys towards the interior of Switzerland, were turning back.

Many of the railroads in Switzerland that tourists pass easily enough now, were almost or quite impracticable then. Some were not begun; more were not completed. On such as were open, there were still large gaps of old road where communication in the winter season was often stopped; on others, there were weak points where the new work was not safe, either under conditions of severe frost, or of rapid thaw. The running of trains on this last class was not to be counted on in the worst time of the year, was contingent upon weather, or was wholly abandoned through the months considered the most dangerous.

At Strasbourg there were more travellers' stories afloat, respecting the difficulties of the way further on, than there were travellers to relate them. Many of these tales were as wild as usual; but the more modestly marvellous did derive some colour from the circumstance that people were indisputably turning back. However, as the road to Basle was open, Vendale's resolution to push on was in no wise

disturbed. Obenreizer's resolution was necessarily Vendale's, seeing that he stood at bay thus desperately:—He must be ruined, or must destroy the evidence that Vendale carried about him, even if he destroyed Vendale with it.

The state of mind of each of these two fellow-travellers towards the other was this. Obenreizer, encircled by impending ruin through Vendale's quickness of action, and seeing the circle narrowed every hour by Vendale's energy, hated him with the animosity of a fierce cunning lower animal. He had always had instinctive movements in his breast against him; perhaps, because of that old sore of gentleman and peasant; perhaps, because of the openness of his nature; perhaps, because of his better looks; perhaps, because of his success with Marguerite; perhaps, on all those grounds, the two last not the least. And now he saw in him, besides, the hunter who was tracking him down. Vendale, on the other hand, always contending generously against his first vague mistrust, now felt bound to contend against it more than ever: reminding himself, "He is Marguerite's guardian. We are on perfectly friendly terms; he is my companion of his own proposal, and can have no interested motive in sharing this undesirable journey." To which pleas in behalf of Obenreizer, chance added one consideration more, when they came to Basle, after a journey of more than twice the average duration.

They had had a late dinner, and were alone in an inn room there, overhanging the Rhine: at that place rapid and deep, swollen and loud. Vendale lounged upon a couch, and Obenreizer walked to and fro: now, stopping at the window, looking at the crooked reflections of the town lights in the dark water (and peradventure thinking, "If I could fling him into it!"); now, resuming his walk with his eyes upon the floor.

"Where shall I rob him, if I can? Where shall I murder him, if I must?" So, as he paced the room, ran the river, ran the river, ran the river.

The burden seemed to him at last, to be growing so plain that he stopped; thinking it as well to suggest another burden to his companion.

"The Rhine sounds to-night," he said with a smile, "like the old waterfall at home. That waterfall which my mother showed to travellers (I told you of it once). The sound of it changed with the weather, as does the sound of all falling waters and flowing waters. When I was pupil of the watchmaker, I remembered it as sometimes saying to me for whole days, 'Who are you, my little wretch? Who are you, my little wretch?' I remembered it as saying, other times, when its sound was hollow, and storm was coming up the Pass: 'Boom, boom, boom. Beat him, beat him, beat him.' Like my mother enraged—if she was my mother."

"If she was?" said Vendale, gradually changing his attitude to a sitting one. "If she was? Why do you say 'if'?"

"What do I know?" replied the other negligently, throwing up his hands and letting them fall as they would. "What would you have? I am so obscurely born, that how can I say? I



was very young, and all the rest of the family were men and women, and my so-called parents were old. Anything is possible of a case like that?"

"Did you ever doubt——?"

"I told you once, I doubt the marriage of those two," he replied, throwing up his hands again, as if he were throwing the unprofitable subject away. "But here I am in Creation. I come of no fine family. What does it matter?"

"At least you are Swiss," said Vendale, after following him with his eyes to and fro.

"How do I know?" he retorted abruptly, and stopping to look back over his shoulder. "I say to you, at least you are English. How do you know?"

"By what I have been told from infancy."

"Ah! I know of myself that way."

"And," added Vendale, pursuing the thought that he could not drive back, "by my earliest recollections."

"I also. I know of myself that way—if that way satisfies."

"Does it not satisfy you?"

"It must. There is nothing like 'it must' in this little world. It must. Two short words those, but stronger than long proof or reasoning."

"You and poor Wilding were born in the same year. You were nearly of an age," said Vendale, again thoughtfully looking after him as he resumed his pacing up and down.

"Yes. Very nearly."

Could Obenreizer be the missing man? In the unknown associations of things, was there a subtler meaning than he himself thought, in that theory so often on his lips about the smallness of the world? Had the Swiss letter presenting him, followed so close on Mrs. Goldstraw's revelation concerning the infant who had been taken away to Switzerland, because he was that infant grown a man? In a world where so many depths lie unsounded, it might be. The chances, or the laws—call them either—that had wrought out the revival of Vendale's own acquaintance with Obenreizer, and had ripened it into intimacy, and had brought them here together this present winter night, were hardly less curious; while read by such a light, they were seen to cohere towards the furtherance of a continuous and an intelligible purpose.

Vendale's awakened thoughts ran high while his eyes musingly followed Obenreizer pacing up and down the room, the river ever running to the tune: "Where shall I rob him, if I can? Where shall I murder him, if I must?" The secret of his dead friend was in no hazard from Vendale's lips; but just as his friend had died of its weight, so did he in his lighter succession feel the burden of the trust, and the obligation to follow any clue, however obscure. He rapidly asked himself, would he like this man to be the real Wilding? No. Argue down his mistrust as he might, he was unwilling to put such a substitute in the place of his late guileless, outspoken, childlike partner. He rapidly asked himself, would he like this man to be rich? No. He had more power than enough

over Marguerite as it was, and wealth might invest him with more. Would he like this man to be Marguerite's Guardian, and yet proved to stand in no degree of relationship towards her, however disconnected and distant? No. But these were not considerations to come between him and fidelity to the dead. Let him see to it that they passed him with no other notice than the knowledge that they *had* passed him, and left him bent on the discharge of a solemn duty. And he did see to it, so soon that he followed his companion with ungrudging eyes, while he still paced the room; that companion, whom he supposed to be moodily reflecting on his own birth, and not on another man's—least of all what man's—violent Death.

The road in advance from Basle to Neuchâtel was better than had been represented. The latest weather had done it good. Drivers, both of horses and mules, had come in that evening after dark, and had reported nothing more difficult to be overcome than trials of patience, harness, wheels, axles, and whipcord. A bargain was soon struck for a carriage and horses, to take them on in the morning, and to start before daylight.

"Do you lock your door at night when travelling?" asked Obenreizer, standing warming his hands by the wood fire in Vendale's chamber, before going to his own.

"Not I. I sleep too soundly."

"You are so sound a sleeper?" he retorted, with an admiring look. "What a blessing!"

"Anything but a blessing to the rest of the house," rejoined Vendale, "if I had to be knocked up in the morning from the outside of my bedroom door."

"I, too," said Obenreizer, "leave open my room. But let me advise you, as a Swiss who knows: always, when you travel in my country, put your papers—and, of course, your money—under your pillow. Always the same place."

"You are not complimentary to your countrymen," laughed Vendale.

"My countrymen," said Obenreizer, with that light touch of his friend's elbows by way of Good Night and benediction, "I suppose, are like the majority of men. And the majority of men will take what they can get. Adieu! At four in the morning."

"Adieu! At four."

Left to himself, Vendale raked the logs together, sprinkled over them the white wood-ashes lying on the hearth, and sat down to compose his thoughts. But they still ran high on their latest theme, and the running of the river tended to agitate rather than to quiet them. As he sat thinking, what little disposition he had had to sleep, departed. He felt it hopeless to lie down yet, and sat dressed by the fire. Marguerite, Wilding, Obenreizer, the business he was then upon, and a thousand hopes and doubts that had nothing to do with it, occupied his mind at once. Everything seemed to have power over him, but slumber. The departed disposition to sleep kept far away.

He had sat for a long time thinking, on the hearth, when his candle burned down, and its light went out. It was of little moment; there was light enough in the fire. He changed his attitude, and, leaning his arm on the chair-back, and his chin upon that hand, sat thinking still.

But he sat between the fire and the bed, and, as the fire flickered in the play of air from the fast-flowing river, his enlarged shadow fluttered on the white wall by the bedside. His attitude gave it an air, half of mourning, and half of bending over the bed imploring. His eyes were observant of it, when he became troubled by the disagreeable fancy that it was like Wilding's shadow, and not his own.

A slight change of place would cause it to disappear. He made the change, and the apparition of his disturbed fancy vanished. He now sat in the shade of a little nook beside the fire, and the door of the room was before him.

It had a long cumbrous iron latch. He saw the latch slowly and softly rise. The door opened a very little, and came to again: as though only the air had moved it. But he saw that the latch was out of the hasp.

The door opened again very slowly, until it opened wide enough to admit some one. It afterwards remained still for a while, as though cautiously held open on the other side. The figure of a man then entered, with its face turned towards the bed, and stood quiet just within the door. Until it said, in a low half-whisper, at the same time taking one step forward: "Vendale!"

"What now?" he answered, springing from his seat; "who is it?"

It was Obenreizer, and he uttered a cry of surprise as Vendale came upon him from that unexpected direction. "Not in bed?" he said, catching him by both shoulders with an instinctive tendency to a struggle, "Then something is wrong!"

"What do you mean?" said Vendale, releasing himself.

"First tell me; you are not ill?"

"Ill? No."

"I have had a bad dream about you. How is it that I see you up and dressed?"

"My good fellow, I may as well ask you how is it that I see you up and undressed."

"I have told you why. I have had a bad dream about you. I tried to rest after it, but it was impossible. I could not make up my mind to stay where I was, without knowing you were safe; and yet I could not make up my mind to come in here. I have been minutes hesitating at the door. It is so easy to laugh at a dream that you have not dreamed. Where is your candle?"

"Burnt out."

"I have a whole one in my room. Shall I fetch it?"

"Do so."

His room was very near, and he was absent for but a few seconds. Coming back with the candle in his hand, he kneeled down on the hearth and lighted it. As he blew with his breath a charred billet into flame for the pur-

pose, Vendale, looking down at him, saw that his lips were white and not easy of control.

"Yes!" said Obenreizer, setting the lighted candle on the table, "it was a bad dream. Only look at me!"

His feet were bare; his red-flannel shirt was thrown back at the throat, and its sleeves were rolled above the elbows; his only other garment, a pair of under pantaloons or drawers, reaching to the ankles, fitted him close and tight. A certain lithe and savage appearance was on his figure, and his eyes were very bright.

"If there had been a wrestle with a robber, as I dreamed," said Obenreizer, "you see, I was stripped for it."

"And armed, too," said Vendale, glancing at his girdle.

"A traveller's dagger, that I always carry on the road," he answered carelessly, half drawing it from its sheath with his left hand, and putting it back again. "Do you carry no such thing?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"No pistols?" said Obenreizer, glancing at the table, and from it to the untouched pillow.

"Nothing of the sort."

"You Englishmen are so confident! You wish to sleep?"

"I have wished to sleep this long time, but I can't do it."

"I neither, after the bad dream. My fire has gone the way of your candle. May I come and sit by yours? Two o'clock! It will soon be four, that it is not worth the trouble to go to bed again."

"I shall not take the trouble to go to bed at all, now," said Vendale; "sit here and keep me company, and welcome."

Going back to his room to arrange his dress, Obenreizer soon returned in a loose cloak and slippers, and they sat down on opposite sides of the hearth. In the interval, Vendale had replenished the fire from the wood-basket in his room, and Obenreizer had put upon the table a flask and cup from his.

"Common cabaret brandy, I am afraid," he said, pouring out; "bought upon the road, and not like yours from Cripple Corner. But yours is exhausted; so much the worse. A cold night, a cold time of night, a cold country, and a cold house. This may be better than nothing; try it."

Vendale took the cup, and did so.

"How do you find it?"

"It has a coarse after-flavour," said Vendale, giving back the cup with a slight shudder, "and I don't like it."

"You are right," said Obenreizer, tasting, and smacking his lips; "it has a coarse after-flavour, and I don't like it. Booh! it burns, though!" He had flung what remained in the cup, upon the fire.

Each of them leaned an elbow on the table, reclined his head upon his hand, and sat looking at the flaring logs. Obenreizer remained watchful and still; but Vendale, after certain nervous twitches and starts, in one of which he rose to his feet and looked wildly about him, fell into the strangest confusion of dreams. He carried his papers in a leather case or pocket-book, in

an inner breast-pocket of his buttoned travelling coat; and whatever he dreamed of, in the lethargy that got possession of him, something importunate in these papers called him out of that dream, though he could not wake from it. He was belated on the steppes of Russia (some shadowy person gave that name to the place) with Marguerite; and yet the sensation of a hand at his breast, softly feeling the outline of the pocket-book as he lay asleep before the fire, was present to him. He was shipwrecked in an open boat at sea, and having lost his clothes, had no other covering than an old sail; and yet a creeping hand, tracing outside all the other pockets of the dress he actually wore, for papers, and finding none answer his touch, warned him to rouse himself. He was in the ancient vault at Cripple Corner, to which was transferred the very bed substantial and present in that very room at Basle; and Wilding (not dead, as he had supposed, and yet he did not wonder much) shook him, and whispered, "Look at that man! Don't you see he has risen, and is turning the pillow? Why should he turn the pillow, if not to seek those papers that are in your breast? Awake!" And yet he slept, and wandered off into other dreams.

Watchful and still, with his elbow on the table and his head upon that hand, his companion at length said: "Vendale! We are called. Past Four!" Then, opening his eyes, he saw, turned sideways on him, the filmy face of Obenreizer.

"You have been in a heavy sleep," he said. "The fatigue of constant travelling and the cold!"

"I am broad awake now," cried Vendale, springing up, but with an unsteady footing. "Haven't you slept at all?"

"I may have dozed, but I seem to have been patiently looking at the fire. Whether or no, we must wash, and breakfast, and turn out. Past four, Vendale; past four!"

It was said in a tone to rouse him, for already he was half asleep again. In his preparation for the day, too, and at his breakfast, he was often virtually asleep while in mechanical action. It was not until the cold dark day was closing in, that he had any distinct impressions of the ride than jingling bells, bitter weather, slipping horses, frowning hill-sides, bleak woods, and a stoppage at some wayside house of entertainment, where they had passed through a cowhouse to reach the travellers' room above. He had been conscious of little more, except of Obenreizer sitting thoughtful at his side all day, and eyeing him much.

But when he shook off his stupor, Obenreizer was not at his side. The carriage was stopping to bait at another wayside house; and a line of long narrow carts, laden with casks of wine, and drawn by horses with a quantity of blue collar and head-gear, were baiting too. These came from the direction in which the travellers were going, and Obenreizer (not thoughtful now, but cheerful and alert) was talking with the foremost driver. As Vendale stretched his limbs, circulated his blood, and cleared off the

lees of his lethargy, with a sharp run to and fro in the bracing air, the line of carts moved on: the drivers all saluting Obenreizer as they passed him.

"Who are those?" asked Vendale.

"They are our carriers—Defresnier and Company's," replied Obenreizer. "Those are our casks of wine." He was singing to himself, and lighting a cigar.

"I have been dreadfully dull company to-day," said Vendale. "I don't know what has been the matter with me."

"You had no sleep last night; and a kind of brain-congestion frequently comes, at first, of such cold," said Obenreizer. "I have seen it often. After all, we shall have our journey for nothing, it seems."

"How for nothing?"

"The House is at Milan. You know, we are a Wine House at Neuchâtel, and a Silk House at Milan? Well, Silk happening to press of a sudden, more than Wine, Defresnier was summoned to Milan. Rolland, the other partner, has been taken ill since his departure, and the doctors will allow him to see no one. A letter awaits you at Neuchâtel to tell you so. I have it from our chief carrier whom you saw me talking with. He was surprised to see me, and said he had that word for you if he met you. What do you do? Go back?"

"Go on," said Vendale.

"On?"

"On? Yes. Across the Alps, and down to Milan."

Obenreizer stopped in his smoking to look at Vendale, and then smoked heavily, looked up the road, looked down the road, looked down at the stones in the road at his feet.

"I have a very serious matter in charge," said Vendale; "more of these missing forms may be turned to as bad account, or worse; I am urged to lose no time in helping the House to take the thief; and nothing shall turn me back."

"No?" cried Obenreizer, taking out his cigar to smile, and giving his hand to his fellow-traveller. "Then nothing shall turn me back. Ho, driver! Despatch. Quick there! Let us push on!"

They travelled through the night. There had been snow, and there was a partial thaw, and they mostly travelled at a foot-pace, and always with many stoppages to breathe the splashed and floundering horses. After an hour's broad daylight, they drew rein at the inn-door at Neuchâtel, having been some eight-and-twenty hours in conquering some eighty English miles.

When they had hurriedly refreshed and changed, they went together to the house of business of Defresnier and Company. There they found the letter which the wine-carrier had described, enclosing the tests and comparisons of hand-writing essential to the discovery of the Forger. Vendale's determination to press forward, without resting, being already taken, the only question to delay them was by what Pass could they cross the Alps? Respecting the state of the two Passes of the

St. Gotthard and the Simplon, the guides and mule-drivers differed greatly; and both Passes were still far enough off, to prevent the travellers from having the benefit of any recent experience of either. Besides which, they well knew that a fall of snow might altogether change the described conditions in a single hour, even if they were correctly stated. But, on the whole, the Simplon appearing to be the hopefuller route, Vendale decided to take it. Obenreizer bore little or no part in the discussion, and scarcely spoke.

To Geneva, to Lausanne, along the level margin of the lake to Vevay, so into the winding valley between the spurs of the mountains, and into the valley of the Rhone. The sound of the carriage-wheels, as they rattled on, through the day, through the night, became as the wheels of a great clock, recording the hours. No change of weather varied the journey, after it had hardened into a sullen frost. In a sombre-yellow sky, they saw the Alpine ranges; and they saw enough of snow on nearer and much lower hill-tops and hill-sides, to sully, by contrast, the purity of lake, torrent, and waterfall, and make the villages look discoloured and dirty. But no snow fell, nor was there any snow-drift on the road. The stalking along the valley of more or less of white mist, changing on their hair and dress into icicles, was the only variety between them and the gloomy sky. And still by day, and still by night, the wheels. And still they rolled, in the hearing of one of them, to the burden, altered from the burden of the Rhine: "The time is gone for robbing him alive, and I must murder him."

They came, at length, to the poor little town of Brieg, at the foot of the Simplon. They came there after dark, but yet could see how dwarfed men's works and men became with the immense mountains towering over them. Here they must lie for the night; and here was warmth of fire, and lamp, and dinner, and wine, and after-conference resounding, with guides and drivers. No human creature had come across the Pass for four days. The snow above the snow-line was too soft for wheeled carriage, and not hard enough for sledge. There was snow in the sky. There had been snow in the sky for days past, and the marvel was that it had not fallen, and the certainty was that it must fall. No vehicle could cross. The journey might be tried on mules, or it might be tried on foot; but the best guides must be paid danger-price in either case, and that, too, whether they succeeded in taking the two travellers across, or turned for safety and brought them back.

In this discussion, Obenreizer bore no part whatever. He sat silently smoking by the fire until the room was cleared and Vendale referred to him.

"Bah! I am weary of these poor devils and their trade," he said, in reply. "Always the same story. It is the story of their trade to-day, as it was the story of their trade when I was a ragged boy. What do you and I want? We want a

knapsack each, and a mountain-staff each. We want no guide; we should guide him; he would not guide us. We leave our portmanteaus here, and we cross together. We have been on the mountains together before now, and I am mountain-born, and I know this Pass—Pass!—rather High Road!—by heart. We will leave these poor devils, in pity, to trade with others; but they must not delay us to make a pretence of earning money. Which is all they mean."

Vendale, glad to be quit of the dispute, and to cut the knot: active, adventurous, bent on getting forward, and therefore very susceptible to the last hint: readily assented. Within two hours, they had purchased what they wanted for the expedition, had packed their knapsacks, and lay down to sleep.

At break of day, they found half the town collected in the narrow street to see them depart. The people talked together in groups; the guides and drivers whispered apart, and looked up at the sky; no one wished them a good journey.

As they began the ascent, a gleam of sun shone from the otherwise unaltered sky, and for a moment turned the tin spires of the town to silver.

"A good omen!" said Vendale (though it died out while he spoke). "Perhaps our example will open the Pass on this side."

"No; we shall not be followed," returned Obenreizer, looking up at the sky and back at the valley. "We shall be alone up yonder."

#### ON THE MOUNTAIN.

The road was fair enough for stout walkers, and the air grew lighter and easier to breathe as the two ascended. But the settled gloom remained as it had remained for days back. Nature seemed to have come to a pause. The sense of hearing, no less than the sense of sight, was troubled by having to wait so long for the change, whatever it might be, that impended. The silence was as palpable and heavy as the lowering clouds—or rather cloud, for there seemed to be but one in all the sky, and that one covering the whole of it.

Although the light was thus dimly shrouded, the prospect was not obscured. Down in the valley of the Rhone behind them, the stream could be traced through all its many windings, oppressively sombre and solemn in its one leaden hue, a colourless waste. Far and high above them, glaciers and suspended avalanches overhung the spots where they must pass by-and-by; deep and dark below them on their right, were awful precipice and roaring torrent; tremendous mountains arose in every vista. The gigantic landscape, uncheered by a touch of changing light or a solitary ray of sun, was yet terribly distinct in its ferocity. The hearts of two lonely men might shrink a little, if they had to win their way for miles and hours among a legion of silent and motionless men—mere men like themselves—all looking at them with fixed and frowning front. But how much more, when the legion is of Nature's mightiest



works, and the frown may turn to fury in an instant!

As they ascended, the road became gradually more rugged and difficult. But the spirits of Vendale rose as they mounted higher, leaving so much more of the road behind them conquered. Obenreizer spoke little, and held on with a determined purpose. Both, in respect of agility and endurance, were well qualified for the expedition. Whatever the born mountaineer read in the weather-tokens, that was illegible to the other, he kept to himself.

"Shall we get across to-day?" asked Vendale.

"No," replied the other. "You see how much deeper the snow lies here than it lay half a league lower. The higher we mount, the deeper the snow will lie. Walking is half wading even now. And the days are so short! If we get as high as the fifth Refuge, and lie to-night at the Hospice, we shall do well."

"Is there no danger of the weather rising in the night," asked Vendale, anxiously, "and snowing us up?"

"There is danger enough about us," said Obenreizer, with a cautious glance onward and upward, "to render silence our best policy. You have heard of the Bridge of the Ganthier?"

"I have crossed it once."

"In the summer?"

"Yes; in the travelling season."

"Yes; but it is another thing at this season;" with a sneer, as though he were out of temper. "This is not a time of year, or a state of things, on an Alpine Pass, that you gentlemen holiday-travellers know much about."

"You are my Guide," said Vendale, good humouredly. "I trust to you."

"I am your Guide," said Obenreizer, "and I will guide you to your journey's end. There is the Bridge before us."

They had made a turn into a desolate and dismal ravine, where the snow lay deep below them, deep above them, deep on every side. While speaking, Obenreizer stood pointing at the Bridge, and observing Vendale's face, with a very singular expression on his own.

"If I, as Guide, had sent you over there, in advance, and encouraged you to give a shout or two, you might have brought down upon yourself tons and tons and tons of snow, that would not only have struck you dead, but buried you deep, at a blow."

"No doubt," said Vendale.

"No doubt. But that is not what I have to do, as Guide. So pass silently. Or, going as we go, our indiscretion might else crush and bury me. Let us get on!"

There was a great accumulation of snow on the Bridge; and such enormous accumulations of snow overhung them from projecting masses of rock, that they might have been making their way through a stormy sky of white clouds. Using his staff skilfully, sounding as he went, and looking upward, with bent shoulders, as it were to resist the mere idea of a fall from above, Obenreizer softly led. Vendale closely followed. They were yet in the midst of their dangerous way, when there came a mighty rush, followed

by a sound as of thunder. Obenreizer clapped his hand on Vendale's mouth and pointed to the track behind them. Its aspect had been wholly changed in a moment. An avalanche had swept over it, and plunged into the torrent at the bottom of the gulf below.

Their appearance at the solitary Inn not far beyond this terrible Bridge, elicited many expressions of astonishment from the people shut up in the house. "We stay but to rest," said Obenreizer, shaking the snow from his dress at the fire. "This gentleman has very pressing occasion to get across;—tell them, Vendale."

"Assuredly, I have very pressing occasion. I must cross."

"You hear, all of you. My friend has very pressing occasion to get across, and we want no advice and no help. I am as good a guide, my fellow-countrymen, as any of you. Now, give us to eat and drink."

In exactly the same way, and in nearly the same words, when it was coming on dark and they had struggled through the greatly increased difficulties of the road, and had at last reached their destination for the night, Obenreizer said to the astonished people of the Hospice, gathering about them at the fire, while they were yet in the act of getting their wet shoes off, and shaking the snow from their clothes:

"It is well to understand one another, friends all. This gentleman——"

"Has," said Vendale, readily taking him up with a smile, "very pressing occasion to get across. Must cross."

"You hear?—has very pressing occasion to get across, must cross. We want no advice and no help. I am mountain-born, and act as Guide. Do not worry us by talking about it, but let us have supper, and wine, and bed."

All through the intense cold of the night, the same awful stillness. Again at sunrise, no sunny tinge to gild or redden the snow. The same interminable waste of deathly white; the same immovable air; the same monotonous gloom in the sky.

"Travellers!" a friendly voice called to them from the door, after they were afoot, knapsack on back and staff in hand, as yesterday: "recollect! There are five places of shelter, near together, on the dangerous road before you; and there is the wooden cross, and there is the next Hospice. Do not stray from the track. If the *Tourmente* comes on, take shelter instantly!"

"The trade of these poor devils!" said Obenreizer to his friend, with a contemptuous backward wave of his hand towards the voice. "How they stick to their trade! You Englishmen say we Swiss are mercenary. Truly, it does look like it."

They had divided between the two knapsacks, such refreshments as they had been able to obtain that morning, and as they deemed it prudent to take. Obenreizer carried the wine as his share of the burden; Vendale, the bread and meat and cheese, and the flask of brandy.

They had for some time laboured upward and onward through the snow—which was now above their knees in the track, and of unknown depth elsewhere—and they were still labouring upward and onward through the most frightful part of that tremendous desolation, when snow began to fall. At first, but a few flakes descended slowly and steadily. After a little while the fall grew much denser, and suddenly it began without apparent cause to whirl itself into spiral shapes. Instantly ensuing upon this last change, an icy blast came roaring at them, and every sound and force imprisoned until now was let loose.

One of the dismal galleries through which the road is carried at that perilous point, a cave eked out by arches of great strength, was near at hand. They struggled into it, and the storm raged wildly. The noise of the wind, the noise of the water, the thundering down of displaced masses of rock and snow, the awful voices with which not only that gorge but every gorge in the whole monstrous range seemed to be suddenly endowed, the darkness as of night, the violent revolving of the snow which beat and broke it into spray and blinded them, the madness of everything around insatiate for destruction, the rapid substitution of furious violence for unnatural calm, and hosts of appalling sounds for silence: these were things, on the edge of a deep abyss, to chill the blood, though the fierce wind, made actually solid by ice and snow, had failed to chill it.

Obenreizer, walking to and fro in the gallery without ceasing, signed to Vendale to help him unbuckle his knapsack. They could see each other, but could not have heard each other speak. Vendale complying, Obenreizer produced his bottle of wine, and poured some out, motioning Vendale to take that for warmth's sake, and not brandy. Vendale again complying, Obenreizer seemed to drink after him, and the two walked backwards and forwards side by side; both well knowing that to rest or sleep would be to die.

The snow came driving heavily into the gallery by the upper end at which they would pass out of it, if they ever passed out; for greater dangers lay on the road behind them than before. The snow soon began to choke the arch. An hour more, and it lay so high as to block out half of the returning daylight. But it froze hard now, as it fell, and could be clambered through or over. The violence of the mountain storm was gradually yielding to a steady snowfall. The wind still raged at intervals, but not incessantly; and when it paused, the snow fell in heavy flakes.

They might have been two hours in their frightful prison, when Obenreizer, now crunching into the mound, now creeping over it with his head bowed down and his body touching the top of the arch, made his way out. Vendale followed close upon him, but followed without clear motive or calculation. For the lethargy of Basle was creeping over him again, and mastering his senses.

How far he had followed out of the gallery, or

with what obstacles he had since contended, he knew not. He became roused to the knowledge that Obenreizer had set upon him, and that they were struggling desperately in the snow. He became roused to the remembrance of what his assailant carried in a girdle. He felt for it, drew it, struck at him, struggled again, struck at him again, cast him off, and stood face to face with him.

"I promised to guide you to your journey's end," said Obenreizer, "and I have kept my promise. The journey of your life ends here. Nothing can prolong it. You are sleeping as you stand."

"You are a villain. What have you done to me?"

"You are a fool. I have drugged you. You are doubly a fool, for I drugged you once before upon the journey, to try you. You are trebly a fool, for I am the thief and forger, and in a few moments I shall take those proofs against the thief and forger from your insensible body."

The entrapped man tried to throw off the lethargy, but its fatal hold upon him was so sure that, even while he heard those words, he stupidly wondered which of them had been wounded, and whose blood it was that he saw sprinkled on the snow.

"What have I done to you," he asked, heavily and thickly, "that you should be—so base—a murderer?"

"Done to me? You would have destroyed me, but that you have come to your journey's end. Your cursed activity interposed between me, and the time I had counted on in which I might have replaced the money. Done to me? You have come in my way—not once, not twice, but again and again and again. Did I try to shake you off in the beginning, or no? You were not to be shaken off. Therefore you die here."

Vendale tried to think coherently, tried to speak coherently, tried to pick up the iron-shod staff he had let fall; failing to touch it, tried to stagger on without its aid. All in vain, all in vain! He stumbled, and fell heavily forward on the brink of the deep chasm.

Stupefied, dozing, unable to stand upon his feet, a veil before his eyes, his sense of hearing deadened, he made such a vigorous rally that, supporting himself on his hands, he saw his enemy stand calmly over him, and heard him speak.

"You call me murderer," said Obenreizer, with a grim laugh. "The name matters very little. But at least I have set my life against yours, for I am surrounded by dangers, and may never make my way out of this place. The *Tourmente* is rising again. The snow is on the whirl. I must have the papers now. Every moment has my life in it."

"Stop!" cried Vendale, in a terrible voice, staggering up with a last flash of fire breaking out of him, and clutching the thievish hands at his breast, in both of his. "Stop! Stand away from me! God bless my Marguerite! Happily she will never know how I died. Stand off from me, and let me look at your murderous

face. Let it remind me—of something—left to say.”

The sight of him fighting so hard for his senses, and the doubt whether he might not for the instant be possessed by the strength of a dozen men, kept his opponent still. Wildly glaring at him, Vendale faltered out the broken words:

“It shall not be—the trust—of the dead—betrayed by me—reputed parents—misinherited fortune—see to it!”

As his head dropped on his breast, and he stumbled on the brink of the chasm as before, the thievish hands went once more, quick and busy, to his breast. He made a convulsive attempt to cry “No!” desperately rolled himself over into the gulf; and sank away from his enemy’s touch, like a phantom in a dreadful dream.

The mountain storm raged again, and passed again. The awful mountain-voices died away, the moon rose, and the soft and silent snow fell.

Two men and two large dogs came out at the door of the Hospice. The men looked carefully around them, and up at the sky. The dogs rolled in the snow, and took it into their mouths, and cast it up with their paws.

One of the men said to the other: “We may venture now. We may find them in one of the five Refuges.” Each fastened on his back, a basket; each took in his hand, a strong spiked pole; each girded under his arms, a looped end of a stout rope, so that they were tied together.

Suddenly the dogs desisted from their gambols in the snow, stood looking down the ascent, put their noses up, put their noses down, became greatly excited, and broke into a deep loud bay together.

The two men looked in the faces of the two dogs. The two dogs looked, with at least equal intelligence, in the faces of the two men.

“Au secours, then! Help! To the rescue!” cried the two men. The two dogs, with a glad, deep, generous bark, bounded away.

“Two more mad ones!” said the men, stricken motionless, and looking away into the moonlight. “Is it possible in such weather! And one of them a woman!”

Each of the dogs had the corner of a woman’s dress in its mouth, and drew her along. She fondled their heads as she came up, and she came up through the snow with an accustomed tread. Not so the large man with her, who was spent and winded.

“Dear guides, dear friends of travellers! I am of your country. We seek two gentlemen crossing the Pass, who should have reached the Hospice this evening.”

“They have reached it, ma’amselle.”

“Thank Heaven! O thank Heaven!”

“But, unhappily, they have gone on again. We are setting forth to seek them even now. We had to wait until the *Tourmente* passed. It has been fearful up here.”

“Dear guides, dear friends of travellers! Let me go with you. Let me go with you, for the love of God! One of those gentlemen is to be my husband. I love him, oh, so dearly. O so dearly! You see I am not faint, you see I am not tired. I am born a peasant girl. I will show you that I know well how to fasten myself to your ropes. I will do it with my own hands. I will swear to be brave and good. But let me go with you, let me go with you! If any mischance should have befallen him, my love would find him, when nothing else could. On my knees, dear friends of travellers! By the love your dear mothers had for your fathers!”

The good rough fellows were moved. “After all,” they murmured to one another, “she speaks but the truth. She knows the ways of the mountains. See how marvellously she has come here! But as to Monsieur there, ma’amselle?”

“Dear Mr. Joey,” said Marguerite, addressing him in his own tongue, “you will remain at the house, and wait for me; will you not?”

“If I know’d which o’ you two recommended it,” growled Joey Ladle, eyeing the two men with great indignation, “I’d fight you for sixpence, and give you half-a-crown towards your expenses. No, miss. I’ll stick by you as long as there’s any sticking left in me, and I’ll die for you when I can’t do better.”

The state of the moon rendering it highly important that no time should be lost, and the dogs showing signs of great uneasiness, the two men quickly took their resolution. The rope that yoked them together was exchanged for a longer one; the party were secured, Marguerite second, and the Cellarman last; and they set out for the Refuges. The actual distance of those places was nothing; the whole five and the next Hospice to boot, being within two miles; but the ghastly way was whitened out and sheeted over.

They made no miss in reaching the Gallery where the two had taken shelter. The second storm of wind and snow had so wildly swept over it since, that their tracks were gone. But the dogs went to and fro with their noses down, and were confident. The party stopping, however, at the further arch, where the second storm had been especially furious, and where the drift was deep, the dogs became troubled, and went about and about, in quest of a lost purpose.

The great abyss being known to lie on the right, they wandered too much to the left, and had to regain the way with infinite labour through a deep field of snow. The leader of the line had stopped it, and was taking note of the landmarks, when one of the dogs fell to tearing up the snow a little before them. Advancing and stooping to look at it, thinking that some one might be overwhelmed there, they saw that it was stained, and that the stain was red.

The other dog was now seen to look over the brink of the gulf, with his fore legs straightened out, lest he should fall into it, and to tremble in every limb. Then the dog who had found the stained snow joined him, and then they ran to

and fro, distressed and whining. Finally, they both stopped on the brink together, and setting up their heads, howled dolefully.

"There is some one lying below," said Marguerite.

"I think so," said the foremost man. "Stand well inward, the two last, and let us look over."

The last man kindled two torches from his basket, and handed them forward. The leader taking one, and Marguerite the other, they looked down: now shading the torches, now moving them to the right or left, now raising them, now depressing them, as moonlight far below contended with black shadows. A piercing cry from Marguerite broke a long silence.

"My God! On a projecting point, where a wall of ice stretches forward over the torrent, I see a human form!"

"Where, ma'amselle, where?"

"See, there! On the shelf of ice below the dogs!"

The leader, with a sickened aspect, drew inward, and they were all silent. But they were not all inactive, for Marguerite, with swift and skilful fingers, had detached both herself and him from the rope in a few seconds.

"Show me the baskets. These two are the only ropes?"

"The only ropes here, ma'amselle; but at the Hospice——"

"If he is alive—I know it is my lover—he will be dead before you can return. Dear Guides! Blessed friends of travellers! Look at me. Watch my hands. If they falter or go wrong, make me your prisoner by force. If they are steady and go right, help me to save him!"

She girded herself with a cord under the breast and arms, she formed it into a kind of jacket, she drew it into knots, she laid its end side by side with the end of the other cord, she twisted and twined the two together, she knotted them together, she set her foot upon the knots, she strained them, she held them for the two men to strain at.

"She is inspired," they said to one another.

"By the Almighty's mercy!" she exclaimed. "You both know that I am by far the lightest here. Give me the brandy and the wine, and lower me down to him. Then go for assistance and a stronger rope. You see that when it is lowered to me—look at this about me now—I can make it fast and safe to his body. Alive or dead, I will bring him up, or die with him. I love him passionately. Can I say more?"

They turned to her companion, but he was lying senseless on the snow.

"Lower me down to him," she said, taking two little kegs they had brought, and hanging them about her, "or I will dash myself to pieces! I am a peasant, and I know no giddiness or fear; and this is nothing to me, and I passionately love him. Lower me down!"

"Ma'amselle, ma'amselle, he must be dying or dead."

"Dying or dead, my husband's head shall lie upon my breast, or I will dash myself to pieces."

They yielded, overborne. With such precautions as their skill and the circumstances admitted, they let her slip from the summit, guiding herself down the precipitous icy wall with her hand, and they lowered down, and lowered down, and lowered down, until the cry came up: "Enough!"

"Is it really he, and is he dead?" they called down, looking over.

The cry came up: "He is insensible; but his heart beats. It beats against mine."

"How does he lie?"

The cry came up: "Upon a ledge of ice. It has thawed beneath him, and it will thaw beneath me. Hasten. If we die, I am content."

One of the two men hurried off with the dogs at such topmost speed as he could make; the other set up the lighted torches in the snow, and applied himself to recovering the Englishman. Much snow-chafing and some brandy got him on his legs, but delirious and quite unconscious where he was.

The watch remained upon the brink, and his cry went down continually: "Courage! They will soon be here. How goes it?" And the cry came up: "His heart still beats against mine. I warm him in my arms. I have cast off the rope, for the ice melts under us, and the rope would separate me from him; but I am not afraid."

The moon went down behind the mountain tops, and all the abyss lay in darkness. The cry went down: "How goes it?" The cry came up: "We are sinking lower, but his heart still beats against mine."

At length, the eager barking of the dogs, and a flare of light upon the snow, proclaimed that help was coming on. Twenty or thirty men, lamps, torches, litters, ropes, blankets, wood to kindle a great fire, restoratives and stimulants, came in fast. The dogs ran from one man to another, and from this thing to that, and ran to the edge of the abyss, dumbly entreating Speed, speed, speed!

The cry went down: "Thanks to God, all is ready. How goes it?"

The cry came up: "We are sinking still, and we are deadly cold. His heart no longer beats against mine. Let no one come down, to add to our weight. Lower the rope only."

The fire was kindled high, a great glare of torches lighted the sides of the precipice, lamps were lowered, a strong rope was lowered. She could be seen passing it round him, and making it secure.

The cry came up into a deathly silence: "Raise! Softly!" They could see her diminished figure shrink, as he was swung into the air.

They gave no shout when some of them laid him on a litter, and others lowered another strong rope. The cry again came up into a deathly silence: "Raise! Softly!" But when they caught her at the brink, then they shouted, then they wept, then they gave thanks to Heaven, then they kissed her feet, then they kissed her dress, then the dogs caressed her,



licked her icy hands, and with their honest faces warmed her frozen bosom!

She broke from them all, and sank over him on his litter, with both her loving hands upon the heart that stood still.

#### ACT IV.

##### THE CLOCK-LOCK.

The pleasant scene was Neuchâtel; the pleasant month was April; the pleasant place was a notary's office; the pleasant person in it was the notary: a rosy, hearty, handsome old man, chief notary of Neuchâtel, known far and wide in the canton as Maître Voigt. Professionally and personally, the notary was a popular citizen. His innumerable kindnesses and his innumerable oddities had for years made him one of the recognised public characters of the pleasant Swiss town. His long brown frock-coat and his black skull-cap were among the institutions of the place; and he carried a snuff-box which, in point of size, was popularly believed to be without a parallel in Europe.

There was another person in the notary's office, not so pleasant as the notary. This was Obenreizer.

An oddly pastoral kind of office it was, and one that would never have answered in England. It stood in a neat back yard, fenced off from a pretty flower-garden. Goats browsed in the doorway, and a cow was within half-a-dozen feet of keeping company with the clerk. Maître Voigt's room was a bright and varnished little room, with panelled walls, like a toy-chamber. According to the seasons of the year, roses, sunflowers, hollyhocks, peeped in at the windows. Maître Voigt's bees hummed through the office all the summer, in at this window and out at that, taking it frequently in their day's work, as if honey were to be made from Maître Voigt's sweet disposition. A large musical box on the chimney-piece, often trilled away at the Overture to Fra Diavolo, or a Selection from William Tell, with a chirruping liveliness that had to be stopped by force on the entrance of a client, and irrepressibly broke out again the moment his back was turned.

"Courage, courage, my good fellow!" said Maître Voigt, patting Obenreizer on the knee, in a fatherly and comforting way. "You will begin a new life to-morrow morning in my office here."

Obenreizer—dressed in mourning, and subdued in manner—lifted his hand, with a white handkerchief in it, to the region of his heart. "The gratitude is here," he said. "But the words to express it are not here."

"Ta-ta-ta! Don't talk to me about gratitude!" said Maître Voigt. "I hate to see a man oppressed. I see you oppressed, and I hold out my hand to you by instinct. Besides, I am not too old yet, to remember my young days. Your father sent me my first client. (It was on a question of half an acre of vineyard that seldom bore any grapes.) Do I owe nothing to your father's son? I owe him a debt of friendly obligation, and I pay it to you. That's

rather neatly expressed, I think," added Maître Voigt, in high good humour with himself. "Permit me to reward my own merit with a pinch of snuff!"

Obenreizer dropped his eyes to the ground, as though he were not even worthy to see the notary take snuff.

"Do me one last favour, sir," he said, when he raised his eyes. "Do not act on impulse. Thus far, you have only a general knowledge of my position. Hear the case for and against me, in its details, before you take me into your office. Let my claim on your benevolence be recognised by your sound reason as well as by your excellent heart. In that case, I may hold up my head against the bitterness of my enemies, and build myself a new reputation on the ruins of the character I have lost."

"As you will," said Maître Voigt. "You speak well, my son. You will be a fine lawyer one of these days."

"The details are not many," pursued Obenreizer. "My troubles begin with the accidental death of my late travelling companion, my lost dear friend, Mr. Vendale."

"Mr. Vendale," repeated the notary. "Just so. I have heard and read of the name, several times within these two months. The name of the unfortunate English gentleman who was killed on the Simplon. When you got that scar upon your cheek and neck."

"—From my own knife," said Obenreizer, touching what must have been an ugly gash at the time of its infliction.

"From your own knife," assented the notary, "and in trying to save him. Good, good, good. That was very good. Vendale. Yes. I have several times, lately, thought it droll that I should once have had a client of that name."

"But the world, sir," returned Obenreizer, "is so small!" Nevertheless he made a mental note that the notary had once had a client of that name.

"As I was saying, sir, the death of that dear travelling comrade begins my troubles. What follows? I save myself. I go down to Milan. I am received with coldness by Defresnier and Company. Shortly afterwards, I am discharged by Defresnier and Company. Why? They give no reason why. I ask, do they assail my honour? No answer. I ask, what is the imputation against me? No answer. I ask, where are their proofs against me? No answer. I ask, what am I to think? The reply is, 'M. Obenreizer is free to think what he will. What M. Obenreizer thinks, is of no importance to Defresnier and Company.' And that is all."

"Perfectly. That is all," assented the notary, taking a large pinch of snuff.

"But is that enough, sir?"

"That is not enough," said Maître Voigt. "The House of Defresnier are my fellow-townsmen—much respected, much esteemed—but the House of Defresnier must not silently destroy a man's character. You can rebut assertion. But how can you rebut silence?"

"Your sense of justice, my dear patron," answered Obenreizer, "states in a word the

cruelty of the case. Does it stop there? No. For, what follows upon that?"

"True, my poor boy," said the notary, with a comforting nod or two; "your ward rebels upon that."

"Rebels is too soft a word," retorted Obenreizer. "My ward revolts from me with horror. My ward defies me. My ward withdraws herself from my authority, and takes shelter (Madame Dor with her) in the house of that English lawyer, Mr. Bintrey, who replies to your summons to her to submit herself to my authority, that she will not do so."

"—And who afterwards writes," said the notary, moving his large snuff-box to look among the papers underneath it for the letter, "that he is coming to confer with me."

"Indeed?" replied Obenreizer, rather checked. "Well, sir. Have I no legal rights?"

"Assuredly, my poor boy," returned the notary. "All but felons have their legal rights."

"And who calls me felon?" said Obenreizer, fiercely.

"No one. Be calm under your wrongs. If the House of Defresnier would call you felon, indeed, we should know how to deal with them."

While saying these words, he had handed Bintrey's very short letter to Obenreizer, who now read it and gave it back.

"In saying," observed Obenreizer with recovered composure, "that he is coming to confer with you, this English lawyer means that he is coming to deny my authority over my ward."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. I know him. He is obstinate and contentious. You will tell me, my dear sir, whether my authority is unassailable, until my ward is of age?"

"Absolutely unassailable."

"I will enforce it. I will make her submit herself to it. For," said Obenreizer, changing his angry tone to one of grateful submission, "I owe it to you, sir; to you, who have so confidently taken an injured man under your protection, and into your employment."

"Make your mind easy," said Maître Voigt. "No more of this now, and no thanks! Be here to-morrow morning, before the other clerk comes—between seven and eight. You will find me in this room; and I will myself initiate you in your work. Go away! go away! I have letters to write. I won't hear a word more."

Dismissed with this generous abruptness, and satisfied with the favourable impression he had left on the old man's mind, Obenreizer was at leisure to revert to the mental note he had made that Maître Voigt once had a client whose name was Vendale.

"I ought to know England well enough by this time;" so his meditations ran, as he sat on a bench in the yard; "and it is not a name I ever encountered there, except—" he looked involuntarily over his shoulder—"as *his* name. Is the world so small that I cannot get away from him, even now when he is dead? He confessed

at the last that he had betrayed the trust of the dead, and misinherited a fortune. And I was to see to it. And I was to stand off, that my face might remind him of it. Why *my* face, unless it concerned *me*? I am sure of his words, for they have been in my ears ever since. Can there be anything bearing on them, in the keeping of this old idiot? Anything to repair my fortunes, and blacken his memory? He dwelt upon my earliest remembrances, that night at Basle. Why, unless he had a purpose in it?"

Maître Voigt's two largest he-goats were butting at him to butt him out of the place, as if for that disrespectful mention of their master. So he got up and left the place. But he walked alone for a long time on the border of the lake, with his head drooped in deep thought.

Between seven and eight next morning, he presented himself again at the office. He found the notary ready for him, at work on some papers which had come in on the previous evening. In a few clear words, Maître Voigt explained the routine of the office, and the duties Obenreizer would be expected to perform. It still wanted five minutes to eight, when the preliminary instructions were declared to be complete.

"I will show you over the house and the offices," said Maître Voigt, "but I must put away these papers first. They come from the municipal authorities, and they must be taken special care of."

Obenreizer saw his chance, here, of finding out the repository in which his employer's private papers were kept.

"Can't I save you the trouble, sir?" he asked. "Can't I put those documents away under your directions?"

Maître Voigt laughed softly to himself; closed the portfolio in which the papers had been sent to him; handed it to Obenreizer.

"Suppose you try," he said. "All my papers of importance are kept yonder."

He pointed to a heavy oaken door, thickly studded with nails, at the lower end of the room. Approaching the door, with the portfolio, Obenreizer discovered, to his astonishment, that there were no means whatever of opening it from the outside. There was no handle, no bolt, no key, and (climax of passive obstruction!) no keyhole.

"There is a second door to this room?" said Obenreizer, appealing to the notary.

"No," said Maître Voigt. "Guess again."

"There is a window?"

"Nothing of the sort. The window has been bricked up. The only way in, is the way by that door. Do you give it up?" cried Maître Voigt, in high triumph. "Listen, my good fellow, and tell me if you hear nothing inside?"

Obenreizer listened for a moment, and started back from the door.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I heard of this when I was apprenticed here at the watch-maker's. Perrin Brothers have finished their famous clock-lock at last—and you have got it?"

"Bravo!" said Maître Voigt. "The clock-lock it is! There, my son! There you have one

more of what the good people of this town call, 'Daddy Voigt's follies.' With all my heart! Let those laugh who win. No thief can steal *my* keys. No burglar can pick *my* lock. No power on earth, short of a battering-ram or a barrel of gunpowder, can move that door, till my little sentinel inside—my worthy friend who goes 'Tick, Tick,' as I tell him—says, 'Open!' The big door obeys the little Tick, Tick, and the little Tick, Tick, obeys *me*. That!" cried Daddy Voigt, snapping his fingers, "for all the thieves in Christendom!"

"May I see it in action?" asked Obenreizer. "Pardon my curiosity, dear sir! You know that I was once a tolerable worker in the clock trade."

"Certainly you shall see it in action," said Maître Voigt. "What is the time now? One minute to eight. Watch, and in one minute you will see the door open of itself."

In one minute, smoothly and slowly and silently, as if invisible hands had set it free, the heavy door opened inward, and disclosed a dark chamber beyond. On three sides, shelves filled the walls, from floor to ceiling. Arranged on the shelves, were rows upon rows of boxes made in the pretty inlaid woodwork of Switzerland, and bearing inscribed on their fronts (for the most part in fanciful coloured letters) the names of the notary's clients.

Maître Voigt lighted a taper, and led the way into the room.

"You shall see the clock," he said, proudly. "I possess the greatest curiosity in Europe. It is only a privileged few whose eyes can look at it. I give the privilege to your good father's son—you shall be one of the favoured few who enter the room with me. See! here it is, on the right-hand wall at the side of the door."

"An ordinary clock," exclaimed Obenreizer. "No! Not an ordinary clock. It has only one hand."

"Aha!" said Maître Voigt. "Not an ordinary clock, my friend. No, no. That one hand goes round the dial. As I put it, so it regulates the hour at which the door shall open. See! The hand points to eight. At eight the door opened, as you saw for yourself."

"Does it open more than once in the four-and-twenty hours?" asked Obenreizer.

"More than once?" repeated the notary, with great scorn. "You don't know, my good friend, Tick Tick! He will open the door as often as I ask him. All he wants, is his directions, and he gets them here. Look below the dial. Here is a half-circle of steel let into the wall, and here is a hand (called the regulator) that travels round it, just as *my* hand chooses. Notice, if you please, that there are figures to guide me on the half-circle of steel. Figure I. means: Open once in the four-and-twenty hours. Figure II. means: Open twice; and so on to the end. I set the regulator every morning, after I have read my letters, and when I know what my day's work is to be. Would you like to see me set it now? What is to-day? Wednesday. Good! This is the day of our rifle-club; there is little

business to do; I grant a half-holiday. No work here to-day, after three o'clock. Let us first put away this portfolio of municipal papers. There! No need to trouble Tick-Tick to open the door until eight to-morrow. Good! I leave the dial-hand at eight; I put back the regulator to 'I.; I close the door; and closed the door remains, past all opening by anybody, till to-morrow morning at eight."

Obenreizer's quickness instantly saw the means by which he might make the clock-lock betray its master's confidence, and place its master's papers at his disposal.

"Stop, sir!" he cried, at the moment when the notary was closing the door. "Don't I see something moving among the boxes—on the floor there?"

(Maître Voigt turned his back for a moment to look. In that moment, Obenreizer's ready hand put the regulator on, from the figure 'I.' to the figure 'II.' Unless the notary looked again at the half-circle of steel, the door would open at eight that evening, as well as at eight next morning, and nobody but Obenreizer would know it.)

"There is nothing!" said Maître Voigt. "Your troubles have shaken your nerves, my son. Some shadow thrown by my taper; or some poor little beetle, who lives among the old lawyer's secrets, running away from the light. Hark! I hear your fellow-clerk in the office. To work! to work! and build to-day the first step that leads to your new fortunes!"

He good humouredly pushed Obenreizer out before him; extinguished the taper, with a last fond glance at his clock which passed harmlessly over the regulator beneath; and closed the oaken door.

At three, the office was shut up. The notary and everybody in the notary's employment, with one exception, went to see the rifle-shooting. Obenreizer had pleaded that he was not in spirits for a public festival. Nobody knew what had become of him. It was believed that he had slipped away for a solitary walk.

The house and offices had been closed but a few minutes, when the door of a shining wardrobe, in the notary's shining room, opened, and Obenreizer stepped out. He walked to a window, unclosed the shutters, satisfied himself that he could escape unseen by way of the garden, turned back into the room, and took his place in the notary's easy chair. He was locked up in the house, and there were five hours to wait before eight o'clock came.

He wore his way through the five hours: some times reading the books and newspapers that lay on the table: sometimes thinking: sometimes walking to and fro. Sunset came on. He closed the window-shutters before he kindled a light. The candle lighted, and the time drawing nearer and nearer, he sat, watch in hand, with his eyes on the oaken door.

At eight, smoothly and softly and silently the door opened.

One after another, he read the names on the outer rows of boxes. No such name as Vendale! He removed the outer row,

and looked at the row behind. These were older boxes, and shabbier boxes. The four first that he examined, were inscribed with French and German names. The fifth bore a name which was almost illegible. He brought it out into the room, and examined it closely. There, covered thickly with time-stains and dust, was the name: "Vendale."

The key hung to the box by a string. He unlocked the box, took out four loose papers that were in it, spread them open on the table, and began to read them. He had not so occupied a minute, when his face fell from its expression of eagerness and avidity, to one of haggard astonishment and disappointment. But, after a little consideration, he copied the papers. He then replaced the papers, replaced the box, closed the door, extinguished the candle, and stole away.

As his murderous and thievish footfall passed out of the garden, the steps of the notary and some one accompanying him stopped at the front door of the house. The lamps were lighted in the little street, and the notary had his door-key in his hand.

"Pray do not pass my house, Mr. Bintrey," he said. "Do me the honour to come in. It is one of our town half-holidays—our Tir—but my people will be back directly. It is droll that you should ask your way to the Hotel of me. Let us eat and drink before you go there."

"Thank you; not to-night," said Bintrey. "Shall I come to you at ten to-morrow?"

"I shall be enchanted, sir, to take so early an opportunity of redressing the wrongs of my injured client," returned the good notary.

"Yes," retorted Bintrey; "your injured client is all very well—but—a word in your ear."

He whispered to the notary, and walked off. When the notary's housekeeper came home, she found him standing at his door motionless, with the key still in his hand, and the door unopened.

#### OBERREIZER'S VICTORY.

The scene shifts again—to the foot of the Simplon, on the Swiss side.

In one of the dreary rooms of the dreary little inn at Brieg, Mr. Bintrey and Maître Voigt sat together at a professional council of two. Mr. Bintrey was searching in his despatch-box. Maître Voigt was looking towards a closed door, painted brown to imitate mahogany, and communicating with an inner room.

"Isn't it time he was here?" asked the notary, shifting his position, and glancing at a second door at the other end of the room, painted yellow to imitate deal.

"He is here," answered Bintrey, after listening for a moment.

The yellow door was opened by a waiter, and Oberreizer walked in.

After greeting Maître Voigt with a cordiality which appeared to cause the notary no little embarrassment, Oberreizer bowed with grave and distant politeness to Bintrey. "For what

reason have I been brought from Neuchâtel to the foot of the mountain?" he inquired, taking the seat which the English lawyer had indicated to him.

"You shall be quite satisfied on that head before our interview is over," returned Bintrey. "For the present, permit me to suggest proceeding at once to business. There has been a correspondence, Mr. Oberreizer, between you and your niece. I am here to represent your niece."

"In other words, you, a lawyer, are here to represent an infraction of the law."

"Admirably put!" said Bintrey. "If all the people I have to deal with were only like you, what an easy profession mine would be! I am here to represent an infraction of the law—that is your point of view. I am here to make a compromise between you and your niece—that is my point of view."

"There must be two parties to a compromise," rejoined Oberreizer. "I decline, in this case, to be one of them. The law gives me authority to control my niece's actions, until she comes of age. She is not yet of age; and I claim my authority."

At this point Maître Voigt attempted to speak. Bintrey silenced him with a compassionate indulgence of tone and manner, as if he was silencing a favourite child.

"No, my worthy friend, not a word. Don't excite yourself unnecessarily; leave it to me." He turned, and addressed himself again to Oberreizer. "I can think of nothing comparable to you, Mr. Oberreizer, but granite—and even that wears out in course of time. In the interests of peace and quietness—for the sake of your own dignity—relax a little. If you will only delegate your authority to another person whom I know of, that person may be trusted never to lose sight of your niece, night or day!"

"You are wasting your time and mine," returned Oberreizer. "If my niece is not rendered up to my authority within one week from this day, I invoke the law. If you resist the law, I take her by force."

He rose to his feet as he said the last word. Maître Voigt looked round again towards the brown door which led into the inner room.

"Have some pity on the poor girl," pleaded Bintrey. "Remember how lately she lost her lover by a dreadful death! Will nothing move you?"

"Nothing."

Bintrey, in his turn, rose to his feet, and looked at Maître Voigt. Maître Voigt's hand, resting on the table, began to tremble. Maître Voigt's eyes remained fixed, as if by irresistible fascination, on the brown door. Oberreizer, suspiciously observing him, looked that way too.

"There is somebody listening in there!" he exclaimed, with a sharp backward glance at Bintrey.

"There are two people listening," answered Bintrey.



"Who are they?"

"You shall see."

With that answer, he raised his voice and spoke the next words—the two common words which are on everybody's lips, at every hour of the day: "Come in!"

The brown door opened. Supported on Marguerite's arm—his sunburnt colour gone, his right arm bandaged and slung over his breast—Vendale stood before the murderer, a man risen from the dead.

In the moment of silence that followed, the singing of a caged bird in the courtyard outside was the one sound stirring in the room. Maître Voigt touched Bintrey, and pointed to Obenreizer. "Look at him!" said the notary, in a whisper.

The shock had paralysed every movement in the villain's body, but the movement of the blood. His face was like the face of a corpse. The one vestige of colour left in it was a livid purple streak which marked the course of the scar, where his victim had wounded him on the cheek and neck. Speechless, breathless, motionless alike in eye and limb, it seemed as if, at the sight of Vendale, the death to which he had doomed Vendale had struck him where he stood.

"Somebody ought to speak to him," said Maître Voigt. "Shall I?"

Even at that moment, Bintrey persisted in silencing the notary, and in keeping the lead in the proceedings to himself. Checking Maître Voigt by a gesture, he dismissed Marguerite and Vendale in these words:—"The object of your appearance here is answered," he said. "If you will withdraw for the present, it may help Mr. Obenreizer to recover himself."

It did help him. As the two passed through the door, and closed it behind them, he drew a deep breath of relief. He looked round him for the chair from which he had risen, and dropped into it.

"Give him time!" pleaded Maître Voigt.

"No," said Bintrey. "I don't know what use he may make of it, if I do." He turned once more to Obenreizer, and went on. "I owe it to myself," he said—"I don't admit, mind, that I owe it to *you*—to account for my appearance in these proceedings, and to state what has been done under my advice, and on my sole responsibility. Can you listen to me?"

"I can listen to you."

"Recall the time when you started for Switzerland with Mr. Vendale," Bintrey began. "You had not left England four-and-twenty hours, before your niece committed an act of imprudence which not even your penetration could foresee. She followed her promised husband on his journey, without asking anybody's advice or permission, and without any better companion to protect her than a Cellarman in Mr. Vendale's employment."

"Why did she follow me on the journey? and how came the Cellarman to be the person who accompanied her?"

"She followed you on the journey," answered

Bintrey, "because she suspected there had been some serious collision between you and Mr. Vendale, which had been kept secret from her; and because she rightly believed you to be capable of serving your interests, or of satisfying your enmity, at the price of a crime. As for the Cellarman, he was one, among the other people in Mr. Vendale's establishment, to whom she had applied (the moment your back was turned) to know if anything had happened between their master and you. The Cellarman alone had something to tell her. A senseless superstition, and a common accident which had happened to his master, in his master's cellar, had connected Mr. Vendale in this man's mind with the idea of danger by murder. Your niece surprised him into a confession, which aggravated tenfold the terrors that possessed her. Aroused to a sense of the mischief he had done, the man, of his own accord, made the one atonement in his power. 'If my master is in danger, miss,' he said, 'it's my duty to follow him, too; and it's more than my duty to take care of *you*.' The two set forth together—and, for once, a superstition has had its use. It decided your niece on taking the journey; and it led the way to saving a man's life. Do you understand me, so far?"

"I understand you, so far."

"My first knowledge of the crime that you had committed," pursued Bintrey, "came to me in the form of a letter from your niece. All you need know is that her love and her courage recovered the body of your victim, and aided the after-efforts which brought him back to life. While he lay helpless at Brieg, under her care, she wrote to me to come out to him. Before starting, I informed Madame Dor that I knew Miss Obenreizer to be safe, and knew where she was. Madame Dor informed me, in return, that a letter had come for your niece, which she knew to be in your handwriting. I took possession of it, and arranged for the forwarding of any other letters which might follow. Arrived at Brieg, I found Mr. Vendale out of danger, and at once devoted myself to hastening the day of reckoning with you. Defresnier and Company turned you off on suspicion; acting on information privately supplied by me. Having stripped you of your false character, the next thing to do was to strip you of your authority over your niece. To reach this end, I not only had no scruple in digging the pitfall under your feet in the dark—I felt a certain professional pleasure in fighting you with your own weapons. By my advice, the truth has been carefully concealed from you, up to this day. By my advice, the trap into which you have walked was set for you (you know why, now, as well as I do) in this place. There was but one certain way of shaking the devilish self-control which has hitherto made you a formidable man. That way has been tried, and (look at me as you may) that way has succeeded. The last thing that remains to be done," concluded Bintrey, producing two little slips of manuscript from his despatch-box, "is to set your niece free. You

have attempted murder, and you have committed forgery and theft. We have the evidence ready against you in both cases. If you are convicted as a felon, you know as well as I do what becomes of your authority over your niece. Personally, I should have preferred taking that way out of it. But considerations are pressed on me which I am not able to resist, and this interview must end, as I have told you already, in a compromise. Sign those lines, resigning all authority over Miss Obenreizer, and pledging yourself never to be seen in England or in Switzerland again; and I will sign an indemnity which secures you against further proceedings on our part."

Obenreizer took the pen, in silence, and signed his niece's release. On receiving the indemnity in return, he rose, but made no movement to leave the room. He stood looking at Maître Voigt with a strange smile gathering at his lips, and a strange light flashing in his filmy eyes.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Bintrey.

Obenreizer pointed to the brown door. "Call them back," he answered. "I have something to say in their presence before I go."

"Say it in my presence," retorted Bintrey. "I decline to call them back."

Obenreizer turned to Maître Voigt. "Do you remember telling me that you once had an English client named Vendale?" he asked.

"Well," answered the notary. "And what of that?"

"Maître Voigt, your clock-lock has betrayed you."

"What do you mean?"

"I have read the letters and certificates in your client's box. I have taken copies of them. I have got the copies here. Is there, or is there not, a reason for calling them back?"

For a moment the notary looked to and fro, between Obenreizer and Bintrey, in helpless astonishment. Recovering himself, he drew his brother-lawyer aside, and hurriedly spoke a few words close at his ear. The face of Bintrey—after first faithfully reflecting the astonishment on the face of Maître Voigt—suddenly altered its expression. He sprang, with the activity of a young man, to the door of the inner room, entered it, remained inside for a minute, and returned followed by Marguerite and Vendale. "Now, Mr. Obenreizer," said Bintrey, "the last move in the game is yours. Play it."

"Before I resign my position as that young lady's guardian," said Obenreizer, "I have a secret to reveal in which she is interested. In making my disclosure, I am not claiming her attention for a narrative which she, or any other person present, is expected to take on trust. I am possessed of written proofs, copies of originals, the authenticity of which Maître Voigt himself can attest. Bear that in mind, and permit me to refer you, at starting, to a date long past—the month of February, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six."

"Mark the date, Mr. Vendale," said Bintrey.

"My first proof," said Obenreizer, taking a paper from his pocket-book. "Copy of a letter, written by an English lady (married) to her sister, a widow. The name of the person writing the letter I shall keep suppressed until I have done. The name of the person to whom the letter is written I am willing to reveal. It is addressed to 'Mrs. Jane Ann Miller, of Groombridge-wells, England.'"

Vendale started, and opened his lips to speak. Bintrey instantly stopped him, as he had stopped Maître Voigt. "No," said the pertinacious lawyer. "Leave it to me."

Obenreizer went on:

"It is needless to trouble you with the first half of the letter," he said. "I can give the substance of it in two words. The writer's position at the time is this. She has been long living in Switzerland with her husband—obliged to live there for the sake of her husband's health. They are about to move to a new residence on the Lake of Neuchâtel in a week, and they will be ready to receive Mrs. Miller as visitor in a fortnight from that time. This said, the writer next enters into an important domestic detail. She has been childless for years—she and her husband have now no hope of children; they are lonely; they want an interest in life; they have decided on adopting a child. Here the important part of the letter begins; and here, therefore, I read it to you word for word."

He folded back the first page of the letter and read as follows:

"\* \* \* Will you help us, my dear sister, to realise our new project? As English people, we wish to adopt an English child. This may be done, I believe, at the Foundling; my husband's lawyers in London will tell you how. I leave the choice to you, with only these conditions attached to it—that the child is to be an infant under a year old, and is to be a boy. Will you pardon the trouble I am giving you, for my sake; and will you bring our adopted child to us, with your own children, when you come to Neuchâtel?"

"I must add a word as to my husband's wishes in this matter. He is resolved to spare the child whom we make our own, any future mortification and loss of self-respect which might be caused by a discovery of his true origin. He will bear my husband's name, and he will be brought up in the belief that he is really our son. His inheritance of what we have to leave will be secured to him—not only according to the laws of England in such cases, but according to the laws of Switzerland also; for we have lived so long in this country, that there is a doubt whether we may not be considered as 'domiciled' in Switzerland. The one precaution left to take is to prevent any after-discovery at the Foundling. Now, our name is a very uncommon one; and if we appear on the Register of the Institution, as the persons adopting the child, there is just a chance that something might result from it. Your name, my dear, is the name of thousands of other people; and if you will consent to appear on the Register, there need be no fear of any discoveries in that quarter. We are moving, by the doctor's orders, to a part of Switzerland in which our circumstances

are quite unknown; and you, as I understand, are about to engage a new nurse for the journey when you come to see us. Under these circumstances, the child may appear as my child, brought back to me under my sister's care. The only servant we take with us from our old home is my own maid, who can be safely trusted. As for the lawyers in England and in Switzerland, it is their profession to keep secrets—and we may feel quite easy in that direction. So there you have our harmless little conspiracy! Write by return of post, my love, and tell me you will join it.” \* \* \*

“Do you still conceal the name of the writer of that letter?” asked Vendale.

“I keep the name of the writer till the last,” answered Obenreizer, “and I proceed to my second proof—a mere slip of paper, this time, as you see. Memorandum given to the Swiss lawyer, who drew the documents referred to in the letter I have just read, expressed as follows:—‘Adopted from the Foundling Hospital of England, 3rd March, 1836, a male infant, called, in the Institution, Walter Wilding. Person appearing on the register, as adopting the child, Mrs. Jane Anne Miller, widow, acting in this matter for her married sister, domiciled in Switzerland.’ Patience!” resumed Obenreizer, as Vendale, breaking loose from Bintrey, started to his feet. “I shall not keep the name concealed much longer. Two more little slips of paper, and I have done. Third proof! Certificate of Doctor Ganz, still living in practice at Neuchâtel, dated July, 1838. The doctor certifies (you shall read it for yourselves directly), first, that he attended the adopted child in its infant maladies; second, that, three months before the date of the certificate, the gentleman adopting the child as his son died; third, that on the date of the certificate, his widow and her maid, taking the adopted child with them, left Neuchâtel on their return to England. One more link now added to this, and my chain of evidence is complete. The maid remained with her mistress till her mistress's death, only a few years since. The maid can swear to the identity of the adopted infant, from his childhood to his youth—from his youth to his manhood, as he is now. There is her address in England—and there, Mr. Vendale, is the fourth, and final proof!”

“Why do you address yourself to me?” said Vendale, as Obenreizer threw the written address on the table.

Obenreizer turned on him, in a sudden frenzy of triumph.

“Because you are the man! If my niece marries you, she marries a bastard, brought up by public charity. If my niece marries you, she marries an impostor, without name or lineage, disguised in the character of a gentleman of rank and family.”

“Bravo!” cried Bintrey. “Admirably put, Mr. Obenreizer! It only wants one word more to complete it. She marries—thanks entirely to your exertions—a man who inherits a handsome fortune, and a man whose origin will make him prouder than ever of his peasant-wife. George Vendale, as brother-executors, let us congrat-

late each other! Our dear dead friend's last wish on earth is accomplished. We have found the lost Walter Wilding. As Mr. Obenreizer said just now—you are the man!”

The words passed by Vendale unheeded. For the moment he was conscious of but one sensation; he heard but one voice. Marguerite's hand was clasping his. Marguerite's voice was whispering to him: “I never loved you, George, as I love you now!”

#### THE CURTAIN FALLS.

May-Day. There is merry-making in Cripple Corner, the chimneys smoke, the patriarchal dining-hall is hung with garlands, and Mrs. Goldstraw, the respected housekeeper, is very busy. For, on this bright morning the young master of Cripple Corner is married to its young mistress, far away: to wit, in the little town of Brieg, in Switzerland, lying at the foot of the Simplon Pass where she saved his life.

The bells ring gaily in the little town of Brieg, and flags are stretched across the street, and rifle shots are heard, and sounding music from brass instruments. Streamer-decorated casks of wine have been rolled out under a gay awning in the public way before the Inn, and there will be free feasting and revelry. What with bells and banners, draperies hanging from windows, explosion of gunpowder, and reverberation of brass music, the little town of Brieg is all in a flutter, like the hearts of its simple people.

It was a stormy night last night, and the mountains are covered with snow. But the sun is bright to-day, the sweet air is fresh, the tin spires of the little town of Brieg are burnished silver, and the Alps are ranges of far-off white cloud in a deep blue sky.

The primitive people of the little town of Brieg have built a greenwood arch across the street, under which the newly married pair shall pass in triumph from the church. It is inscribed, on that side, “HONOUR AND LOVE to MARGUERITE VENDALE!” for the people are proud of her to enthusiasm. This greeting of the bride under her new name is affectionately meant as a surprise, and therefore the arrangement has been made that she, unconscious why, shall be taken to the Church by a tortuous back way. A scheme not difficult to carry into execution in the crooked little town of Brieg.

So, all things are in readiness, and they are to go and come on foot. Assembled in the Inn's best chamber, festively adorned, are the bride and bridegroom, the Neuchâtel notary, the London lawyer, Madame Dor, and a certain large mysterious Englishman, popularly known as Monsieur Zhoé-Ladelle. And behold Madame Dor, arrayed in a spotless pair of gloves of her own, with no hand in the air, but both hands clasped round the neck of the bride; to embrace whom Madame Dor has turned her broad back on the company, consistent to the last.

“Forgive me, my beautiful,” pleads Madame Dor, “for that I ever was his she-cat!”

"She-cat, Madame Dor?"

"Engaged to sit watching my so charming mouse," are the explanatory words of Madame Dor, delivered with a penitential sob.

"Why, you were our best friend! George, dearest, tell Madame Dor. Was she not our best friend?"

"Undoubtedly, darling. What should we have done without her?"

"You are both so generous," cries Madame Dor, accepting consolation, and immediately relapsing. "But I commenced as a she-cat."

"Ah! But like the cat in the fairy-story, good Madame Dor," says Vendale, saluting her cheek, "you were a true woman. And, being a true woman, the sympathy of your heart was with true love."

"I don't wish to deprive Madame Dor of her share in the embraces that are going on," Mr. Bintrey puts in, watch in hand, "and I don't presume to offer any objection to your having got yourselves mixed together, in the corner there, like the three Graces. I merely remark that I think it's time we were moving. What are *your* sentiments on that subject, Mr. Ladle?"

"Clear, sir," replies Joey, with a gracious grin. "I'm clearer altogether, sir, for having lived so many weeks upon the surface. I never was half so long upon the surface afore, and it's done me a power of good. At Cripple Corner, I was too much below it. Atop of the Simpleton, I was a deal too high above it. I've found the medium here, sir. And if ever I take it in convivial, in all the rest of my days, I mean to do it this day, to the toast of 'Bless 'em both.'"

"I, too!" says Bintrey. "And now, Monsieur Voigt, let you and me be two men of Marseilles, and allons, marchons, arm-in-arm!"

They go down to the door, where others are waiting for them, and they go quietly to the church, and the happy marriage takes place. While the ceremony is yet in progress, the notary is called out. When it is finished, he has returned, is standing behind Vendale, and touches him on the shoulder.

"Go to the side door, one moment, Monsieur Vendale. Alone. Leave Madame to me."

At the side door of the church, are the same two men from the Hospice. They are snow-stained and travel-worn. They wish him joy, and then each lays his broad hand upon Vendale's breast, and one says in a low voice, while the other steadfastly regards him:

"It is here, Monsieur. Your litter. The very same."

"My litter is here? Why?"

"Hush! For the sake of Madame. Your companion of that day——"

"What of him?"

The man looks at his comrade, and his comrade takes him up. Each keeps his hand laid earnestly on Vendale's breast.

"He had been living at the first Refuge, monsieur, for some days. The weather was now good, now bad."

"Yes?"

"He arrived at our Hospice the day before yesterday, and, having refreshed himself with sleep on the floor before the fire, wrapped in his cloak, was resolute to go on, before dark, to the next Hospice. He had a great fear of that part of the way, and thought it would be worse to-morrow."

"Yes?"

"He went on alone. He had passed the gallery, when an avalanche—like that which fell behind you near the Bridge of the Ganthier——"

"Killed him?"

"We dug him out, suffocated and broken all to pieces! But, monsieur, as to Madame. We have brought him here on the litter, to be buried. We must ascend the street outside. Madame must not see. It would be an accursed thing to bring the litter through the arch across the street, until Madame has passed through. As you descend, we who accompany the litter will set it down on the stones of the street the second to the right, and will stand before it. But do not let Madame turn her head towards the street the second to the right. There is no time to lose. Madame will be alarmed by your absence. Adieu!"

Vendale returns to his bride, and draws her hand through his unnam'd arm. A pretty procession awaits them at the main door of the church. They take their station in it, and descend the street amidst the ringing of the bells, the firing of the guns, the waving of the flags, the playing of the music, the shouts, the smiles, and tears, of the excited town. Heads are uncovered as she passes, hands are kissed to her, all the people bless her. "Heaven's benediction on the dear girl! See where she goes in her youth and beauty; she who so nobly saved his life!"

Near the corner of the street the second to the right, he speaks to her, and calls her attention to the windows on the opposite side. The corner well passed, he says: "Do not look round, my darling, for a reason that I have," and turns his head. Then, looking back along the street, he sees the litter and its bearers passing up alone under the arch, as he and she and their marriage train go down towards the shining valley.

THE END OF THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER FOR 1867.

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[For further Select Medical Opinions see other side.

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1819	182 1 11	100 7 3	1836	121 12 3	48 3 0	1853	89 13 2	15 15 2
1820	154 6 8	83 6 7	1837	119 6 4	45 17 5	1854	88 7 0	13 16 9
1821	152 7 5	81 6 0	1838	117 0 5	43 13 2	1855	87 0 10	12 10 0
1822	150 8 2	79 3 7	1839	114 14 8	41 10 0	1856	85 14 8	11 4 7
1823	148 9 0	77 3 1	1840	112 14 3	39 10 9	1857	84 8 6	10 0 0
1824	146 9 9	75 1 5	1841	110 14 1	37 12 4	1858	83 2 4	8 16 6
1825	144 10 6	73 2 2	1842	108 13 9	35 14 0	1859	81 16 2	7 13 8
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1827	140 12 0	69 3 10	1844	104 13 4	31 12 1	1861	69 0 0	5 12 6
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1829	136 13 6	65 0 10	1846	100 12 9	27 8 2	1863	46 0 0	3 13 9
1830	134 14 3	62 15 3	1847	99 1 5	25 11 0	1864	34 10 0	2 14 4
1831	132 15 1	60 7 7	1848	97 10 1	23 14 7	1865	23 0 0	1 15 7
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Year of Entry.	Additions 1816 to 1824.			Additions 1825 to 1831.			Additions 1832 to 1838.			Additions 1839 to 1845.			Additions 1846 to 1852.			Additions 1853 to 1859.			Additions 1860 to 1866.			Total Additions per £1000		
	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1816 to 1819	260	0	0	132	6	0	194	18	5	222	4	1	221	13	1	230	19	9	299	4	0	1561	5	4
1820	..	..	..	180	0	0	165	4	0	188	6	7	187	17	2	195	16	1	251	10	5	1168	14	3
1821	..	..	..	165	0	0	163	8	0	185	18	8	185	9	4	193	6	4	247	18	3	1140	14	7
1822	..	..	..	150	0	0	161	0	0	183	10	10	183	1	7	190	16	6	244	5	1	1112	14	0
1823	..	..	..	135	0	0	158	18	0	181	2	11	180	13	10	188	6	8	240	12	5	1084	13	10
1824	..	..	..	120	0	0	156	16	0	178	15	0	178	6	1	185	17	1	235	18	9	1056	12	11
1825	..	..	..	105	0	0	154	14	0	176	7	2	175	18	4	183	7	3	233	6	1	1028	12	10
1826	..	..	..	90	0	0	152	12	0	173	19	3	173	10	7	180	17	3	229	13	2	1000	12	3
1827	..	..	..	75	0	0	150	10	0	171	11	5	171	2	10	178	7	7	225	19	9	972	11	7
1828	..	..	..	60	0	0	148	8	0	169	3	6	168	15	0	175	17	9	222	6	0	944	10	8
1829	..	..	..	45	0	0	146	6	0	166	15	8	166	7	3	173	8	1	218	10	0	916	7	0
1830	..	..	..	30	0	0	144	4	0	164	7	9	163	19	6	170	18	2	214	12	8	888	2	1
1831	..	..	..	15	0	0	142	2	0	161	19	11	161	11	9	168	8	2	210	13	11	859	15	9
1832	..	..	..	..	..	..	140	0	0	159	12	0	159	4	0	165	18	8	206	13	9	831	8	5
1833	..	..	..	..	..	..	120	0	0	156	16	0	156	8	2	163	0	6	202	2	5	798	7	1
1834	..	..	..	..	..	..	100	0	0	154	0	0	153	12	3	160	2	2	197	10	11	765	5	4
1835	..	..	..	..	..	..	80	0	0	151	4	0	150	16	5	157	4	0	192	19	6	732	3	11
1836	..	..	..	..	..	..	60	0	0	148	8	0	148	0	7	154	5	9	188	8	0	699	2	4
1837	..	..	..	..	..	..	40	0	0	145	12	0	145	4	9	151	7	4	183	16	6	666	0	7
1838	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	0	0	142	16	0	142	8	10	148	9	2	179	5	0	632	19	0
1839	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	140	0	0	139	13	0	145	12	0	174	13	9	599	18	9
1840	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	130	0	0	137	4	0	142	19	2	170	11	9	570	14	11
1841	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	100	0	0	134	15	0	140	8	10	166	9	2	541	13	7
1842	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	80	0	0	132	0	0	137	17	7	162	6	6	512	10	1
1843	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	60	0	0	129	17	0	135	7	3	158	1	11	483	6	2
1844	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	40	0	0	127	8	0	132	15	10	153	14	8	453	18	6
1845	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	20	0	0	124	19	0	130	4	10	149	5	8	424	9	6
1846	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	122	10	0	127	13	8	144	15	7	394	19	3
1847	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	105	0	0	125	13	10	140	19	11	371	13	9
1848	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	87	10	0	123	13	11	137	3	8	348	7	7
1849	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	70	0	0	121	14	3	133	6	11	325	1	2
1850	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	52	10	0	119	14	4	129	9	5	301	13	9
1851	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	35	0	0	117	14	7	125	11	5	278	6	0
1852	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	13	14	9	113	14	9	121	12	6	254	17	3
1853	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	113	15	0	118	12	5	232	7	5
1854	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	97	10	0	114	4	10	211	14	10
1855	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	81	5	0	110	16	8	192	1	8
1856	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	65	0	0	107	9	0	172	9	0
1857	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	48	15	0	104	1	8	152	16	8
1858	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	32	10	0	100	14	7	133	4	7
1859	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	16	5	0	97	7	5	113	12	5
1860	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	94	0	5	94	0	5
1861	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	80	14	11	80	14	11
1862	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	67	8	4	67	8	4
1863	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	53	19	0	53	19	0
1864	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	40	9	1	40	9	1
1865	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	26	19	3	26	19	3
1866	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	13	9	7	13	9	7

Such a realisation and Division of Profit among the Assured form one of the most remarkable proofs of the prosperity of a Life Assurance Institution, and abundantly illustrate the great and growing advantages enjoyed by Policyholders in the Scottish Widows' Fund.

Forms of Proposal for Assurances,  
to participate in the Profits of 1867, must be lodged  
on or before 31st January 1868.

SAMUEL RALEIGH, Manager.  
J. J. P. ANDERSON, Secretary.

Belfast, 34 ARTHUR STREET.  
Leeds, 18 EAST PARADE.

Dundee, 53 REFORM STREET.  
Birmingham, 39A NEW STREET.

Notice.

6d. Monthly.

THE NEW VOLUME OF THE  
**PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE**

Will commence January 1, 1868, under  
entirely New Management.

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The January Part will contain a **LARGE COLOURED PICTURE**, copied, by special permission, from one by **JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS, R.A.**; **ONE LARGE PHOTO-LITHO PICTURE**, copied, by special permission, from one of **SIR EDWIN LANDSEER'S** pictures, '**THE PETS**;' besides a number of good Wood Engravings.

1. The '**PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE**' will be published in future only in Monthly Parts, and it will be arranged so as to complete a volume in six months.
2. Each Part will contain a Large Coloured Picture, copied in the best style from the best Artists; and a Large Picture in Tints, or black and white, printed on fine toned paper, besides numerous good Engravings on Wood.
3. It will be printed in future in a clear and legible type.
4. It will have a thicker paper, and great care will be taken to give effective and artistic Illustrations.
5. It will have, in addition to Articles of an amusing and instructive character, Articles of a distinctly religious tone, in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England.
6. The January Part will contain a New Year's Sermon by the **BISHOP OF LINCOLN**.

No pains will be spared to make it a thoroughly interesting Magazine for Family Reading. Fuller details will be given in the January Part, orders for which are requested to be sent as early as possible.

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*Each Part, containing 64 large pages, price Sixpence.*

**SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,**  
**GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.**

**AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.**

*November 1867.*





